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Invisible Wings*

THE STORY OF A BRAVE GIRL'S UNAIDED BATTLE WITH THE
WORLD

By Mariom Trelawney

IN five minutes the silver bells would ring the hour. A chaplain would appear on the altar steps and read the service, as was the custom in the seminary on Christmas Eve. Now the chapel was profoundly silent. Silent were the girls whose shrouded heads were seen dimly behind the large grating that separated them from the world.

Of the students who remained during the Christmas vacation two sat with drowsy eyes in the first pew. One, Zoe Sand, a dark-haired girl of seventeen, was conscious only of the fact that she was very sleepy, and that the incense and candlelight made her still more so; but she smiled encouragement to her companion, Doreen O'Moore, who was to sing a solo.

Doreen, tall and slender, stood at the rail, her shining eyes wide, her soul alive to the beauty of her surroundings and the sanctity of the moment. She drank in the

wonder of the altar, which was set like a jewel on the green-carpeted steps. It was covered with golden brocade. Innumerable candles formed a design of soft yellow lights leading to the tabernacle.

Lilies leaned in their mystic beauty against the stained glass windows at either side of the altar; and around the tabernacle gardenias breathed forth their life in waves of intense perfume.

A clarion-voiced bell struck the cold December air. While it was vibrating, it seemed that all the other bells in the world joined in, vying with one another to play the most exalted harmony. From the choir came Doreen O'Moore's voice—very low, at first, with deep notes; then a little clearer, until it soared in tremulous ecstasy out into the chapel. It went to each heart, infolding it tenderly, and like the spirit of music it lifted each soul heavenward. Then the voice grew fainter and passed into si-

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lence, yet lingered like the scent of vanished roses.

The superior looked approvingly up into the choir, and her old face became very grave, for she saw that Doreen had grown into womanhood.

Later, after the Christmas salutation, she detained Sister Sebastian.

"I see that little Doreen O'Moore is quite a beauty," she said.

"Yes. She has been with us so many years, and she is leaving at the end of this term."

"Ah, yes!" A smile lighted up the sad old eyes. "The bud has blossomed overnight," the superior whispered, and then sighed. "Ah, sister, I must give less time to science and more to the children; but I am getting old—even now I do not quite remember about Dory."

"She was to have left us last June," said Sister Sebastian.

The superior's thin mouth contracted into a line beneath the sharp aquiline nose, and one eyebrow climbed her high, finely wrinkled forehead as she listened. She was one of those people who balance their thoughts on their eyebrows.

"She wished to make her living by singing in public, and we feared the temptation which would come her way."

"Ah!" sighed the superior, nodding her head sadly. "In what profession would a girl of such beauty be safe? Will she not always remain with us, sister?"

"I fear the wings are impatient to fly," replied Sister Sebastian. "I feel, too, that she is meant for some great work in the world."

"We will pray," said the soft, monotonous voice of the old woman. "We must pray. Send the child to me to-morrow, after benediction. Good night, sister."

Sister Sebastian tiptoed out of the room.

II

It was Christmas afternoon in the seminary. Doreen and Zoe sat with Sister Sebastian in the recreation room—a very long, very bare room with spotless, highly polished floors and benches. The three talked of various uninteresting things.

There was the customary silence when the bells rang the Angelus in Puccini-like melody. The young teacher studied Zoe Sand's pretty face.

Zoe was very dark; yet her hair was not black, but a tawny brown that started in

little golden threads at the temples. It was coiled up with a pretty movement to the back of her head. She wore the simple black uniform of the convent, but her waist, as always, was bound in tightly with a ribbon, tied with the rakish bow for which she was known, and of which she was secretly proud.

Her spotless white collar showed a pretty, rather brown neck, which had a charming bend at the back and a strong line in front that melted into a full, dimpled chin. Her nose was straight and very fine, with little dents behind the delicate nostrils, which gave her face a sort of pretty emphasis—though not yet could you tell just what was emphasized. Her mouth had nothing of this precision and character. It was red as a flower of youth, and wide and rather formless.

"Your teeth are chiseled to an impeccable evenness," smiled Sister Sebastian, as the Angelus ceased, and Zoe smiled up at her. "You have eyes like a Chinese girl's—they are prettily curved up at the corners," the instructor went on, as if amused with Zoe's evident interest in hearing herself described.

"But I haven't hands like a Chinese girl's," pouted Zoe. "Sister, just look at them!"

Though Zoe was quite tall and thin, her hands were plump and short, with stubby fingers; but she had given most careful attention to pointing and training the square, pink nails.

"I see you are getting ready for social experiences," said the sister, smiling at the high polish on those nails. "Read me the invitation from Mrs. Sand, dear," she added, turning to Dory.

Promptly a delicate pink note was produced from Dory's skirt pocket and tenderly smoothed out. Putting her arm around Zoe, the girl began:

DEAREST ZOE:

I have just decided to accompany your uncle when he goes abroad for a year, but I cannot leave you here in the apartment alone. I am not very strong, and it is absolutely necessary that I should go; and as you are now a young lady, deary, you do not really need me to take care of you. Can you not persuade this beloved chum of yours, Dory O'Moore, to come and stay here with you? Old Nurse Emma will take good care of you both during my absence. Your little friend might give music lessons—if she wished—that would start her for next year, when she might take a studio.

Write her answer at once, that I may make my arrangements. When you arrive, your uncle

and I are going to give you a present of a nice fur coat.

Love from—

MOTHER.

Dory read in an oratorical style that gave due importance to this screed. Finishing, she closed her eyes and hugged her knees with quivering delight.

"And the end of the story is," said she, "that Zoe did not have a hard time in persuading her friend to accept!"

"Well, it really is very nice," said Sister Sebastian.

She gazed for a moment at the girl's lovely face, and for some unknown reason she felt unhappy. Excusing herself, and holding her arms beneath the hanging black sleeves, she walked slowly away toward the chapel.

Once out of sight, Sister Sebastian heaved a sigh, and her heavy eyelids dropped. She paused in the vestry, amid all the altar flowers, and began to think.

She thought of this girl—of Dory O'Moore, scarcely nineteen years of age—thought of her little flowerlike face, her small Greek head with the heavy autumn-brown hair, her curved mouth that seemed molded by tenderness itself, and her dark eyes. Sister Sebastian looked vaguely into the flowers.

"Dory's eyes are darker than any flowers one ever sees, except purple irises shaded by tall trees after sunset."

She thought of an unconscious way Dory had of laying her long, slender hands upon her childish breast—a touching gesture. Sister Sebastian turned and looked out of the barred window. She seemed to hear the flutelike voice soaring in the chapel. She saw Dory's face transformed into something almost supernatural with the ecstasy of music.

"Her voice is like a violin with a human heart," thought Sister Sebastian; "but to earn her living by it—"

There was no possibility of opera, for Dory's voice was not big enough. Comic opera? Concert? She only knew the road would be hard for this child to travel, and tears welled up in her throat. For when she herself had been very young—but as the memory came back, she turned pale and passed into the chapel to pray.

In the library of a New York apartment on Madison Avenue, Mrs. Sand stared at Harry Balfour as she smoked a cigarette,

and Harry stared at Bella as he smoked a cigar.

"Well!" said he. "Certainly seems funny—you being the mother of a young lady!"

Bella not only looked guilty—she felt like a criminal. Even in the sunlight a line could not be detected in her face, and her figure was slender and lithe as a young boy's. She tried to laugh lightly now as she said:

"Yes, it seems impossible my baby is eighteen—a—quite a *débutante*!"

Bella raised her trained eyebrows and vainly tried to look unconcerned.

"Heigho!" she added. "To think that if her father were alive now, my little Zoe would be a debbie in the very best set this year!"

Harry took a deliberate puff at his cigar, and responded:

"Well, since he hasn't been on the scene for fifteen years to my knowledge, the set of hams she'll meet around here will be adequate to start her in her mother's footsteps. Your parlor snakes will think you've been holding back on them when they see your baby!"

Mrs. Sand did not exactly answer that, but suavely remarked:

"Not only will they see Zoe, but she is going to bring her best friend with her—a charming girl. You remember Dory O'Moore?"

This high "company manner" could usually be counted on to awe Harry a little, and Mrs. Sand did not want too much frankness just now. This time his answering grunt was not exactly one of awe; but at least he was sufficiently quelled to drop a discussion that might have led him into tasteless arithmetic as to Zoe's mother's precise age.

III

SUNSET light was streaming through the windows of the bare recreation room, where all the girls were playing. As the clock struck five, Dory nudged her friend's arm and whispered:

"I've got to go and see the superior. I am to be in the office at five minutes past five."

The superior received only on rare and important occasions; so Zoe was immediately interested.

"What do you suppose this is for?" she inquired.

"Oh, I suppose it's just to say good-by and give me my money. Sister Sebastian told me that I had five hundred dollars, you know."

"Oooh!" breathed Zoe in ecstasy.

"You can spend it all on clothes!"

"And perfume," added Dory breathlessly, as they both began running to the door. "Violet perfume—such as you had on your handkerchief. I'll put it on my hair, and it will be the last thing I'll smell at night before going to sleep."

"Oh, I like Eastern perfume—the kind that mother has," said Zoe, as they ran up the long hall toward the monastery. "They make you nearly faint, they're so wonderful. Men love that kind," she whispered mysteriously. "They say—"

"Is my hair neat?" demanded Dory abruptly, as they stood outside the great Gothic door of the office.

Zoe smoothed Dory's hair with her hand, kissed her, and tiptoed away. Trembling with the excitement of the unknown, Dory knocked.

"Come in," said a voice.

The superior sat at a wide Gothic desk, her back against the dark wall. Her colorless eyes were unnaturally large, and her tight headband seemed to draw them up painfully. Her bent finger pointed to a chair at the other side of the desk, and her thin lips smiled a sad but very kindly smile. She spoke in a curious veiled monotone, so that her voice seemed like a voice from the beyond.

"My child," she began, "your school days are over, and you are at liberty to leave us—if you choose."

Dory felt for her handkerchief.

"You are at liberty to go out into a world utterly unknown to you—into all the darkness and the little light that it contains." She paused and fingered her silver crucifix. "But you have had many happy years here with us who love you, have you not, Dory?"

"Yes, reverend mother."

"Dear child, there is a home and protection always within these walls for you, if you wish to remain."

"Thank you," said Dory in a tiny voice. "But I—I'm—I'm afraid I can't. Thank you just the same—"

"Perhaps it would be wise to stay with us a little while longer, at least," said the quiet old voice, which seemed to measure each word.

"I don't know," answered the still tinier voice of Dory.

"Do you wish very much to go out into a cruel world—the evils of which you know not, dear? I call you to me this evening because I saw and heard you sing, and you do not seem to be made for material things, my dear child."

"Thanks, reverend mother, I hope I shall—shall be worthy of your—your kind thought," stammered Dory, digging her nails so deeply into her tender palms that it hurt. "I think I shall overcome evil," she went on. "I have spent many hours in chapel praying God to help me. The world, although I don't know it well, is very dear to me, and the people are dear to me; so I look forward to being in it and trying to be good myself, and to being good to other people—to helping them in some way. I've prayed that some terrible punishment should be given me if I should soil my soul with sin."

Dory, being an extremist in all things, had really done this in all sincerity.

The superior's stoical expression was in sharp contrast to that of the girl, who was now trembling from head to foot. The two women looked at each other silently. To each the other was an unsolvable enigma.

The superior selected one of the large keys from a chain on her belt, and slowly opened the bottom drawer of her desk. From this she drew out a large envelope.

"My child, I can tell you in no better way of the dreadful world than by reading your mother's life, written to me in a letter by your dear departed grandmother."

The old woman put on some horn-rimmed glasses. Glancing over them, she saw that Dory's eyes were strangely brilliant and that her hands were clasped together convulsively.

"You remember your mother, dear child?"

"Yes, I was seven years old when she died—I remember."

"Prove that you have learned the great lesson of self-control by listening very quietly."

The superior glanced over the letter, placed her large, dominant forefinger at the top of one page, and the low, monotonous voice began:

The sad chapter of poor Doreen's life is over. It held all the misery you feared the world would bring her, and more than you in your life of grace can conceive. Of course they were infinitely

happy while Barry was well; but when his investments failed his health broke down. Finally, in destitution, Doreen was forced to find some way to earn their living, and she went on the concert stage.

Poor Barry survived only a short time. It was pitiful, his end. My child was broken in spirit, but there was little Dory, and there was the necessity of money. Hence the brilliant theatrical career of which you so strongly disapproved. I assure you there was no sinful gayety attached to it, though it was surrounded with evil. You will forgive me if I say that the typical Irishwoman, as Doreen was, has modesty and virtue bred in her bone. She withstands temptation, as my daughter did, for honor was to her a priceless possession.

Though our acquaintances were numbered in the thousands, we had few real friends; but those few were loyal and very near to us. There was one, a young man, who was a great consolation. He, too, was in trouble, poor boy. There had been a girl to whom he had been devoted, but his family objected and forbade the marriage. It affected her mind, and she had killed herself. Doreen reminded him of her, and he came to us very often.

At those times my daughter would sing simple songs—I can hear her now, her voice expressing the sweetness of her nature. Tears would come to her eyes, for her heart spoke and told us of her own sorrow. She was always very quiet after those songs. She sat in a way she had, her head on her hand, like a tired bird which, after spreading its wings and soaring away to the skies, singing in ecstasy, had fallen back to earth when the song ended.

Felix Grange would hold little Dory in his lap, and tell her stories. He would tell us stories, too, of his own social world, which seemed just as wonderful and fantastic. I want little Dory to know him when she goes forth into the world.

Things went fairly well for a few years, but there came a time when Doreen became thin and colorless from overwork. We all begged her to rest, and she consented; but the manager persuaded her to appear once more, in an opera which had been written specially for her. There came the opening night. Even through the golden wig and paint she looked ill. I begged her not to go on; but the manager declared she must, just for that once.

Doreen assured me that if her little girl were allowed to sit in the wings, she could go through the performance; and she did. She sang superbly. There came encore after encore. At the end of the third act there was a torrent of applause. The hard old manager and all the company were affected.

Doreen sat holding her child until it was time to go on again. Then, with the first note, the hemorrhage came in one fierce pang of pain. Oh, my friend, it was the end! I remember hearing the doctor saying bitterly to the manager:

"I told you she needed rest—I told you, but you insisted. She sang, but she sang with her heart's blood to-night! Yes, she sang with her heart's blood."

Ah, it is hard to believe that my child is dead! I sit with dry eyes gazing into space, the tears scalding my throat. The only sunshine in my life is little Dory. You must send her to me once

a week while I live. I shall stay near you. A tiny income left by my brother supports me, and Doreen leaves enough for her baby's education.

I place all in your hands. You are the only person to whom I have written at such length—you whose place in the world has always been that of a comforter of troubled souls. I hope we may soon meet, dear friend of mine. With affectionate thoughts,

Always sincerely,

MILDRED SHAWN.

The superior had read quietly, continuously. Hearing no sound from the girl, she was pleased at her self-control; but when the letter had been carefully folded and placed in the envelope, and her glasses put back into their case, she looked and saw that Dory was sitting quite rigid, her eyes glassy, as if she were turned to stone. This transformed the superior into her real self, for in a moment she had the girl in her great arms, holding the little head on her ample breast, and gently rocking Dory to and fro.

"There, there!" she cooed, and the floodgates were opened.

A wild sob shook the girl's body, and left it shivering like an aspen leaf. The sympathetic old woman drew out an enormous linen handkerchief, wiped the pretty eyes, and kissed each cheek.

"Now, child, go and see your friend Zoe, and then spend an hour in meditation, quite alone." Then, becoming the superior again, she added in a low, chantlike voice: "While you are alone, my child, reflect on the treachery and cruelty of the life beyond these walls. Hearts are lacerated—souls are lost. Meditate upon the iniquitous world that broke your mother's heart. You are so young that it pains me deeply to think of your going out into such dangers without protection."

Through the long hours of night the girl wept bitterly, her hand ever seeking a little statuette beneath her pillow. Of that figurine you shall hear presently. When Zoe Sand peeped in at her through the starched white curtains, she pretended to be asleep; for no human being could console her or understand her.

Through the long hours she suffered, while she lived over and over what her mother must have suffered; but never once did she consider staying in the convent. Her heart was hungry—starving for human love. She knew that the kindly but placid superior could not understand.

Her father and mother had tasted happiness together. The unemotional old woman could not comprehend that her mother had lived those happy days over and over until the end, and had died looking forward to a reunion in another world. Dory understood it. She felt that life had not been all cruel to those ill-fated lovers.

Toward morning Dory fell asleep and dreamed exquisite dreams.

IV

BLUE and gold was the sky next day, and lovely clouds rose one upon the other in soft colors, as does melody upon melody in some operas. The sun showed itself after many days of hiding, and for the sun it is not difficult to dry the eyes of one sad girl.

Doreen lifted her aching head from the pillow and smiled at the thought of going out into the world—going to meet life.

Of course, for the next day or so, there were sudden floods of tears now and then; but between times there was much packing and rummaging and getting things together.

"Whose are those?" demanded Zoe Sand, popping her head up out of the depths of a clothes sheet and holding out a white object.

"Mine," answered Dory.

"Awful coarse old things!" remarked Zoe. "Throw them out, dear. We'll wear nothing but silk ones now, like mother."

But Dory recognized a piece of lace her grandmother had crocheted, and smoothed the despoiled things in her trunk.

"Does your mother wear silk ones all the time?" she asked.

"Sure!" answered the excited Zoe. She paused for a moment to recall Dory's one glimpse of the world—the unforgettable occasion when she had visited some one besides her grandmother. "Say, Dory, do you remember the time you were visiting at my house in New York, when we were about thirteen years old? We dressed up in mother's afternoon gowns and silk stockings and slippers, and got big picture hats, and put mother's paint on our faces—"

"Yes," Dory broke in, her eyes brilliant as she sat down to rest. "And we went for a stroll on Riverside Drive. I felt a crowd gathering behind us, and we just suspected we might be the cause of it; so we looked back, and there we were daintily holding our skirts up above our knees, nearly to our necks, at the back!"

Their laughter pealed at this.

"Then," giggled Dory, hugging her knees, as usual when delighted, "what did we do but gather them up on all sides and run for our lives up the street to the house! Oh, shall I ever forget my feeling when we saw your mother in the doorway—and your uncle?"

"Oh," laughed Zoe, "dear old Uncle Frank would never say a word to us; but my other uncle—this one who lives with us now—Uncle Harry!"

Zoe's black eyes sought the heavens for comprehension.

"Oh, have you two uncles?" asked Dory, feeling a great interest in her friend's family affairs now that she was to become part of the household.

"Oh, yes," said Zoe; "but Uncle Frank, who used to live with us before, has gone to Europe or somewhere. We can paint our faces as much as we please now," Zoe went on. "There'll be nothing but chiffon skirts, I expect, and we shall know how to wear them, too!"

"Yes," agreed Dory. "You have what they call *chic*, Zoe!"

"Well," responded the flattered Zoe, "I've heard mother say she'd rather see a woman have *chic* than virtue!"

There was a soft footstep outside.

"Who was that?" whispered Zoe. "Was that Sister Sebastian who just slunk by?"

"Oh, I don't think so! She's not sneaky," said Dory, her heart fluttering in her throat.

Zoe peeped out of the door cautiously, and looked up and down the corridor that ran past the wardrobe room.

"There she is, sitting up at the end like a nasty old sphinx," announced Zoe. "I'll bet she's been listening to everything! She's sitting up there now with a smirk on her like a slit in a tomato can."

A faint rustle was heard, and Zoe flew back to the chest. Sister Sebastian appeared in the doorway. She looked strangely pale.

"Is there something I can do for you, children?"

"No," said Zoe mellifluently. "I only looked out at you, dear, because we are going so soon, and there won't be many more chances to see that wonderful Mona Lisa smile of yours."

Zoe kissed their teacher on each passive cheek. Dory said nothing, but she saw that the sister's eyes looked troubled, and

she felt depressed, as always when Zoe did this sort of thing.

Sister Sebastian returned to her post at the end of the corridor.

V

A LOUIS QUINZE clock of carved ivory pointed to half past four. The two girls had arrived in New York at midday. Not having slept at all the night before, in their excitement, they had been sent to their rooms after luncheon for a little siesta before dinner.

"You will be called at five," Mrs. Sand had said; but Dory, uncalled, had awakened on the moment.

A very soft quilt caressed her cheek. It was of a deep rose-colored silk. Dory patted it vaguely, then became conscious of the exquisite linen of the bed. She buried her face in the soft embroidered pillow, and felt for the statuette.

"Dearest!" she breathed. "This is the dream world come true!"

Her face flushed by deep sleep, she sat up in bed, rubbed her eyes like a baby, and looked around.

"It's the dream world come true," she said half aloud, and pounced out of bed onto a great white bearskin rug.

The walls of the room were paneled in pale gray wood. On one side were three long mirrors reaching to the ceiling. Each mirror had a little ivory knob. The girl examined them. Lo, out came the mirrors, and there appeared all sorts of drawers and clothes racks.

By setting the mirrors at an angle, Dory, to her immense delight, saw herself on all sides. With one hand she made a kind of *princesse* dress out of her nightgown; with the other she held her auburn curls high on her head. The effect was ravishing. Dory viewed with no little pleasure the pretty curve at the back of her neck and the tiny curls that clung to it. Her slender form was shown to full advantage. Pirouetting and curtsying, she hummed a gay tune while she danced a minuet, ending by hanging the rose-colored quilt in long folds around her shoulders, and taking her steps with an eye on her train.

"Some day I shall have a coat of this color," thought Dory.

She looked around for more treasures. There were many beautiful gray chairs, all of which were tried and found worthy of this new world.

What a dressing table! Never had she dreamed of so wonderful a dressing table as that between the long windows. It was small, and had frivolous legs that curved beneath the weight of the golden treasure it bore. It wore an antique cover of Flanders lace, and its mirror was heart-shaped. At either side, like two crystal sentinels guarding the precious gold toilet set, were tall candlesticks of cut glass, topped by creamy shades.

There were many rose-colored curtains, which reached from the sky-painted ceiling to the carpet. Doreen parted one pair, and found herself in her bathroom. She fairly purred with delight. It had soft green latticework on the walls, upon which English ivy grew. Dory folded her arms and gazed with unbelieving eyes at the sunken bathtub of green tiles, the quaintly decorated ceiling, and the rows of bottles upon crystal shelves.

Embroidered towels hung upon silver rails. Dory put out her hand to touch one of them.

"Silk towels, I suppose—nothing less," she whispered.

Investigation proved that they were linen, and warm. The silver rods were heated. At this marvel of luxury, she played a silent tune with her finger tips on her lips.

"And everything here is warm and beautiful and cozy, like the towels. This is the kind of place I should like—when I—marry!"

Still in her dream, she rose and glanced at herself in a mirror. She saw a fascinating carved knob just above the tub, and her finger reached out to touch it. More wonders might be disclosed.

The knob turned. Down poured a fountain of cold water all over the pretty gown, drenching her completely. Like Eve, she was sorry she had looked for more treasures. Her heart stood still. The bathroom would be ruined! An unconscious hand on a button brought help.

Tap, tap, at the door.

"Oooh—come in!" cried Dory.

Tap, tap, again.

"Come in!" cried the girl.

Bangs, the English butler, entered respectfully, in full regimentals, bearing a tray and a small glass of some amber-colored liquid.

"Oooh!" cried Dory. "I thought—please go out!"

Bangs clapped his hand over his mouth and retreated.

"Dory!" called the voice of Zoe.

"Oh, come quick!" replied Dory.

Zoe appeared in a peach-colored kimono.

"What ever is the matter?"

"I'm drenched! Oh, Zoe, fix that fountain! It will run over everything. Who was that who just came in here? Oooh, I was—my nighty was—"

This brought from Zoe one of those crescendo laughs which the sisters had always begged her to control. Full vent was given to it now, while Dory donned a dry nightgown. Zoe explained the butler, and then began to laugh again so loudly that her shouts brought Mrs. Sand.

With long, undulating movements the slender, silken-gowned woman came in and sat beside the bed, while Zoe at the top of her voice related the Bangs incident.

"That is droll," said her mother.

"Dory is like a cunning baby! Better jump in bed for a moment, dear, and get warm."

Bending over, she took the rose-colored quilt and covered Dory very tenderly.

To Dory, the latest and most astonishing object of art in the place was Mrs. Sand. She looked exactly like Zoe, and almost as young, except in certain lights; but even now one of those cruel lights stood in judgment. The blue-black hair was arranged severely, and close to the small, shapely head; but the roots showed white here and there, at the part. The marble skin of the beautiful Bella Sand now looked a little wrinkled and gray beneath the pink powder. Her large mouth had more form than Zoe's, because she painted it in a Cupid's bow. She had the same nose, over which the skin was drawn a little more tightly, and the same kind of large teeth, which showed too prominently when she laughed. When she looked out beneath half-closed, blackened lashes, those strong teeth seemed to make even her soft black eyes metallic.

"Well, dear!" said Mrs. Sand in her soft, studied voice. "Do you think you will be happy leading a quiet life here with Zoe and the maid for a year?"

"Happy? I shall be eternally grateful to you."

Mrs. Sand laid her thin, deeply veined hand upon the girl's soft one.

"I am very fond of you, Dory. You must think of this house as your home."

"I'm fond of you, too," said Dory quite truthfully.

After the two had gone to dress, Dory wished ardently that Mrs. Sand would not call attention to that deeply veined hand by covering it with so many diamond rings.

At half past eight that night the family sat down to dinner. Dory had been presented to Mr. Balfour, "Uncle Harry," who occupied the seat at the head of the table. Rose lights dissolved the tapestry-hung walls into Rembrandt shadows, showed the design of the rich silver and glass on the lace-covered table, and accentuated the curious exotic beauty of Mrs. Sand.

Zoe was pale, wild-eyed, and very loquacious. Dory was slightly flushed and very silent. Like a frightened bird, her heart fluttered about her breast.

While Zoe chattered, strange glances were exchanged between Mrs. Sand, as her slanting eyes looked over her thin-stemmed wineglass, and Uncle Harry, who ate ravenously for a long time.

"Ha!" he breathed, as the last course was carried out. "I've been away from the good old States for a year, and I've been hungry, you can bet, for good old American cooking. I tell you, Bella, you don't get this over in France!"

"That's strange," laughed Mrs. Sand. "It is well that I am going with you the next time. I'll show you the real restaurants. Antoine, our chef here, is French, you know."

"Oui—that's one on you, Uncle Harry," cried Zoe, delighted that conversation had begun, and waving her fingers under his nose.

"Well," drawled Uncle Harry, "as long as Dory likes it, it's all right. Do you like it, Dory?"

Leaning over, he laid his large, heavy hand on Dory's arm. The familiarity dyed her neck and face a deep rose.

"Oh, you silly!" laughed Zoe. "See her blush!"

"You don't mind if I call you Dory?" ventured Uncle Harry, pretending to cry with elephantine playfulness.

"Since she is a young lady now, it might be better to call her Miss O'Moore just yet," ventured Mrs. Sand.

As the slow, warm voice spoke, an icy wave seemed to chill the room.

"You keep out of this, Bella!" roared

Uncle Henry, drawing back. "Did I ask you?"

"My dear boy, I was only joking. Don't be cross!"

Uncle Henry had spoken unkindly to her beautiful benefactress. Dory disliked him, and knew that she always would.

Coffee was served by the patronizing butler, in tiny Dresden cups. Mrs. Sand placed a cigarette between her thick, scarlet lips, and the thin, blue smoke, rising before the dark fire of her eyes, reminded Dory of the incense rising before the light of the heathen god which was in the smoking room downstairs. She had never seen a woman smoke before. Mrs. Sand made it seem evil in a beautiful, mysterious way.

Opposite, smoking a large cigar, sat Uncle Harry. What a picture of arrogant selfishness he was! Scant light hair victoriously covered his large round head—victoriously, because André, the valet, was proud of his achievement in making it suffice. Proud also was André of the rather high collars, made possible by daily massage and constant reminders to "keep the chin well up, sir."

André admired his master that the large freckles on his forehead came from a torpid liver, and that nothing would eradicate them save exercise or diet; so Uncle Henry retained the freckles. His mouth was sensual in repose, and dropped pathetically into the well-trained chin, as does that of a French bulldog; but it was not often in repose, for it moved along with his selfish thoughts, puckering and twisting itself to the sides.

When he laughed, strange to say, he was immediately transformed; for then his strong white teeth showed themselves, and Harry Balfour looked like a fat, freckled-faced boy. Not that a fat, freckled-faced boy is a particularly attractive object, but as such Uncle Harry was certainly improved, and Mrs. Sand found great consolation in the transformation.

The butler poured some cognac for Mr. Balfour, who raised it to his lips and again fell to studying Mrs. Sand as she leaned across the table. Is there anything more maddening than the steady stare of a mute questioner? He always wore the same expression when he thought most profoundly—an expression of blankness. One sees it on certain gentlemen as they look out of their club windows. As the French say, so the cow watches the passing train.

Bella Sand twitched her feet uncomfortably as she smiled gayly in answer to some trivial question of Zoe's.

Uncle Harry glanced at Dory—stared at her in gloating admiration. The lights in her agate-brown eyes were intensified by the black lashes that grew unusually long on the lower lids. If one scrutinized them as Uncle Harry did now, one perceived that those strange eyes were not exactly alike. One was slightly different in form from the other; but this defect was an added charm, and seemed to emphasize the wistful femininity of the tender face. He glanced approvingly at the sensitive, rose-colored mouth, and dilated his thick nostrils as he breathed in the fresh perfume of youth which clung about her.

Another long puff at the cigar.

"Bella was a good-looking woman in the old days," he thought. "When I met her twelve years ago, and even up to a couple of years ago, there was none better than Bella."

Moreover, he realized and appreciated the fact that it had been Bella who made him presentable. Coming from the West at the age of thirty, he had looked like a comic supplement. He was the loud plaid, brown derby, diamond ring kind, with a fat cigar in his mouth at an angle of forty-five degrees. Bella Sand had transformed him into a well-groomed person, without flagrant accent, without vulgar flash, and he had become a member of several good New York clubs.

"I have invited some people in to-night to celebrate your home-coming," came the soft voice of Mrs. Sand. Her chair was drawn back by Bangs, and they all rose. "I hope you are pleased, dear?"

"Oh, a party!" cried Zoe.

"Yes—an evening with music. Jules Blenner is going to play for us. That will be a great treat."

"Well, there'll soon be another party in honor of my going away," said Mr. Balfour, as significantly as possible.

"Yes, *our* going away," added Mrs. Sand sweetly.

There was no answer from Uncle Harry, and they all passed into the salon.

"Don't you like parties?" demanded Zoe of her purple-faced uncle.

"Yes, surely," said he. "I'll brighten up in a little while—don't you worry. I say"—turning to Mrs. Sand—"now that Zoe is a young lady, I think she may as

well call me Henry. Don't you think so, Bella?"

Mrs. Sand raised her eyebrows, but as he was about to speak she acquiesced quickly.

"Why, yes—I should think so."

"Oh, that seems funny," laughed Zoe.

"Well, that is what you are to do now, my dear, since Harry wishes it," replied her mother with sweet sternness.

The bell was heard dimly.

"I think that is Silvia's voice," said Mrs. Sand.

"Ha, we're off!" cried Harry, suddenly jumping up.

Mrs. Sand ran to him.

"You are so handsome to-night!" she whispered, as she fingered a carnation in his buttonhole.

While she arranged it, Harry Balfour looked over her shoulder at Dory.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Sand. "You are wonderful when you smile like that!"

She fussed with the carnation, but Balfour still looked over her shoulder at Dory, who was sorting some music.

Doreen's white silk dress fell in fine sculptural folds about her. She looked like a marble statue of girlhood, in all its wistful purity.

"Mrs. Van Twiller," announced Bangs.

There was a faint rustle. Then two palpitating bosoms appeared over a black jet dress, and a mouth painted clown-red was all that could be seen under a huge black hat.

"My dear Silvia!" cried Mrs. Sand. "So glad to see you! This is my little daughter Zoe—you remember her—and Miss O'Moore."

The two girls stood near Mrs. Sand while other more or less vivid people were introduced.

"My ears were run out at the conversation all around me," Dory explained to Zoe afterward.

Mrs. Van Twiller and Mr. Balfour stood just behind her as the people came in.

"You heard that story of—" said Silvia.

"Oh, yes, yes!" Harry answered. "Everybody seems to come to it these days. What did they charge him with—er—ah—"

"Oh, no!" said she, comprehending, and whispered something in his ear.

"Haw, haw!" roared Harry. "Oh, Silvia, you are a wag! It's good to see you again. One doesn't get the good old Amer-

ican wit over there in France. They have no sense of humor in France."

"Why, I didn't know you spoke French very fluently," replied Mrs. Van Twiller. "Do you?"

"No—not fluently. In fact, I don't understand their damned old language at all."

"Ha, ha!" laughed she. "But you are quite sure they have no sense of humor, anyway!"

The pleasant voice of a gentleman interrupted.

"What did you say is the name of your guest, Harry?"

"O'Moore—Doreen O'Moore—just out of the seminary, my boy," gurgled Harry, much as one might speak of a fresh-laid egg at midwinter in the city.

"Present me, will you? Mrs. Sand forgot to in the rush."

"We-ell!" drawled Balfour. "You want to be presented, do you, Felix? Some peach, what? Well, you're the kind of handsome gadabout I want to keep away from her."

"Oh, I say!"

"You know," interjected Mrs. Van Twiller, "Felix has well earned the reputation he has that every girl in town—"

"Well," said Balfour, putting his stubby arm around the square, lean shoulders, "don't use your fatal charms here. Miss O'Moore, may I present Mr. Grange? Now," added the gay host, "remember, Felix!"

He winked and waved a large finger of warning. When a person of elemental mind is also vulgar, he is the lowest form of human animal, no matter what his caste.

"Shall we go and sit down over there and watch the passing crowd?" said Felix Grange to Dory.

The maze of people, the gayety, had gone to the girl's head like champagne, but the vulgar element had depressed and perplexed her. This meeting with Felix Grange brought a different breath. She felt herself being propped with pillows in an inoffensive way—nay, a charming way. Somehow the contrasting thought of Harry Balfour made her like this man. His virile, tapering hands placed a little footstool for her.

Felix Grange's dark head was superbly set on fine shoulders. He had a small black mustache, and gray-blue eyes with dark shadows that enhanced their charm. When

he smiled, she did not feel embarrassed, as she did with Harry Balfour.

"Perhaps it is *my* Felix Grange—the one grandma spoke of in her letters to the superior," thought Dory, with a throb of emotion.

Grange seemed made for these exquisite surroundings, while Balfour seemed like a bull in a china shop.

"Oh, I wonder!" she began in a quivering little voice, and paused. For some reason, she felt that if this were not her Felix Grange, she would burst into tears. "Please tell me," she went on, a great pleading in her voice, "are you *my*—are you the Mr. Felix Grange that knew my mother? My mother was Mrs. Barry O'Moore."

"Yes, Dory, I am he."

Dory's eyes widened. She scarcely believed it for a moment, he was so calm.

"You doubt it, little Dory?"

"Oh, no! Only you seem so—not so—glad!"

"We mustn't have any scenes here, Dory. Just rest quietly, and I will tell you stories as of old—only true stories. You must lunch with me to-morrow," he said quietly. "We'll have a real talk. You were Zoe's chum, and now you are visiting her, since school is over—is that it?"

"Yes!" gasped Dory wonderingly.

There seemed to be some complex here she did not understand.

"Dear me!" sighed Felix, apparently ignoring Dory's excitement. "There's a funny crowd here to-night."

He seemed to settle back within his chair so comfortably that Dory felt herself settling calmly in hers. Felix was one of those people who could radiate quiet. He gave her a soothing sense of safety.

"Wonderful!" replied Dory, with a little sigh.

"Well, yes—wonderful in its way," he continued. "One always sees a lot of color at Bella Sand's."

"It's like a fairy gathering. I never dreamed anything so wonderful!"

"Well, yes, Dory—or like a great big Punch and Judy show. See that funny automaton over there? That's Mrs. Van Twiller."

"Who is she?" whispered Dory.

"That's Mrs. Sand's chum. She's an actress, and she acts better off the stage than on. She's always pretending she's a lady. It's a perfect mania with her."

"She looks like the deep-eyed villainess," laughed Dory. "Please tell me one thing—did you know me the minute you saw me?"

"Almost. That is why I came over and took you away. You have not only your mother's face, but her voice—that flavor of the old brogue."

"I feel happy. It seems as if I had met my father."

"That's nice, Dory! You look younger now than you did when I knew you so many years ago."

Dory looked as if she were puzzling to understand the joke. Felix Grange glanced around the room and smiled.

"Never have I seen anything quite so young as you to-night," he went on.

Dory dismissed that as something she did not have to understand. She felt it her turn to converse.

"Oh, look at the funny little lady over there with the gold hair! She's short-waisted and tight-waisted, and then very large right down to her feet. I believe she has melted!"

"Ha!" laughed Felix. "She does belong to the melted class."

"Tell me, who is that little girl with the flaxen curls and red slippers? She looks like a big doll with real eyelashes."

"Now that," answered Felix, "is the melting variety. She's a soubrette with wonderful painted eyelashes. The hatchet-faced woman with her is her fond mother."

Felix explained that all the best soubrettes had hatchet-faced mothers who chaperoned them at all times except most imperative ones.

Just then a tall, thin woman dressed in black undulated across the room, smoking a cigarette through a long amber holder.

"That is Beryl Nickots, a sculptor. She's famous."

"All her strength seems to have gone to her hair," sighed Dory. "That great pile of it weighs down her poor frail body cruelly. Poor thing, she looks so ill!"

"She's well and strong," answered Felix; "but she's one of those people who think it poetic to look like a dying consumptive. She prefers it."

The woman seemed to sense that they were discussing her. She immediately struck a Botticelli pose, stretching her scrawny neck and coughing a little.

"She'll come over here now," smiled Felix. "You must tell her she looks deathly

pale, and ask if she does not want a window open. She will love you for it—not that I want her to love you.”

As they talked on, poor Dory began to feel suffocated. This exotic air did not give oxygen enough for—was it her lungs or her mind?

“Oh, I feel faint,” she suddenly cried.

Felix Grange opened the window and fetched her some water.

Grange had seen too much of the world to accept an innocent air at its face value. He had been talking in a worldly, sophisticated vein to see how Dory would take it. Now, as he sat gently fanning the girl's pale face, he saw with relief that she had recoiled from all this gross Vanity Fair. She was making a brave effort to keep her head above water; but he feared that the vortex into which she had been thrown, and which she understood so little, would swallow her in time. He had met Zoe the year before, on her vacation, and had thought her fascinating; but the point was that now, to his amazement and horror, he met the daughter of Mrs. Barry O'Moore with her.

It was as if he had met his own child in this house. He thought of the unforgettable time during which he had known Dory's mother—thought of the genuine admiration he had had for her, and of the sympathy and help she had given him in a time of sorrow. She and Barry had opened the doors of their home to him, and it was the only home he had ever known. The places in which he had grown up were merely houses—a very smart town house and a country house.

His mother? His mother was an elegantly dressed person who came to see him—her only son—at a certain time every day. Her chief pleasure was in reading under a picture in the society column:

The most strikingly gowned woman at the opera was Mrs. Cyril Grange.

When his father died and left him millions, Felix was naturally considered a great catch. His own mother and all his friends' mothers had combined in pleading with him not to lower the family name by marrying the charming poor girl with whom he was in love. It was only after her suicide that he realized that he had proven himself a weakling and a cad, and had let happiness sift through his fingers.

His vacant life was comforted by Do-

reen O'Moore. It was she who encouraged him in his career. It was Doreen who christened the magazine which had since proved, as she said it would, an object in life for him and a force in the world of literature.

Some years after Mrs. O'Moore's death, Felix Grange married the daughter of an old family as distinguished as his own, and everybody was content. At a time of loneliness he and Marion Vesey were thrown much together during a Newport season, and she knew precisely what she wanted. Before the summer was over, every one had them engaged. Before the winter was over they had been constantly fêted and dined; and finally, amid barbaric ceremony and grandeur, they had been married.

Marion Grange assured her husband that she was happy, though he marveled how she could be; and happy she really was. Was she not now the entire mistress of herself and of smart town and country houses? Moreover, she took a passionate and active interest in the antisuffrage movement, and surrounded herself with the adulation of society's rich dilettantes.

Felix regarded all these things as trivialities, and cared nothing for them. Marion scoffed at the idea of children, home—at all that Felix most craved.

“You are so magnificently equipped for child-bearing by nature,” he pleaded.

But Marion had stubbornly pursued her artificial life, and Felix was forced to bow to her will. Though they appeared properly attentive to each other when he accompanied her at such important functions as weddings, christenings, dog-shows, and funerals, their paths steadily diverged.

Often the dance of society's best butterflies begins with a low and gracious bow. The steps are very pretty at first; then the pair keep farther and farther apart. When the parting is made final and complete, the newspapers give the savory details to an audience that is always interested, though it seldom applauds.

After his marriage Felix became more engrossed in his magazine than ever. He became a munificent patron of the arts. He also became devoted to a *déclassé* set of Bohemians, whose frank vulgarity amused him. Bella Sand was the center of a would-be smart and very fast set, and for years Felix Grange had been a habitué at her teas and soirées. Hence his appearance to-night.

He had often thought of Doreen O'Moore, who had died in so tragic a way, and wondered what had become of her child, little Dory. Now that he had found the girl, he wished that he could carry her bodily out of the place that night. He realized that he had taken a good deal of wine at dinner, and he reflected that he would be more competent in the morning. Then he would inquire into Dory's finances, and would make all necessary arrangements for her immediate departure and permanent protection. Thus he would partially return the tender kindness of her mother and grandmother to himself in the long ago, when he was so nearly crushed to death.

"There, there, Dory! You must enjoy the Punch and Judy show," he said at last, still waving the fan gently. "I am right here with you, just as in the old days when I used to hold you high up at the Gignol. Do you see the funny purple-faced old doll with the flaring white whiskers? He's trained to be a lawyer. Sometimes he goes through his part very well, and lots of gold is put into his little pockets. It enables him to support that overdressed lady by his side—the lady who is overflowing her gown. What do you think of her?"

Dory was reassured, and laughed.

"She looks as if she would 'burst from her shell with a horrible yell,'" the girl quoted.

Felix resolved that his first act of protection must be to prepare Dory for learning later what sort of people she had fallen among. He called her attention to a stalky little man with black patent-leather hair, a round face, and a frilled shirt-front.

"Ugh! He's horrid!" ejaculated Dory. "I'm sure he is talking about himself to those pretty women in the corner. He'd have to take the part of *Humpty-Dumpty*, the hard-boiled egg, in our Gignol."

"That is Frank Hilliard," Felix told her. "He's a nice little fellow. He's a thief."

"What?"

"Yes—stole so much money that he's a great pet around town. They whisper sympathetically, 'Kleptomaniac!'"

"How—how awful!" Poor Dory's face clouded again. "Yet God has given him that lovely wife."

"Ah!" said Felix, gently wafting the little fan. "The law of compensation always works in the end. You see, he'll spend all his money in this way—the lovely little wife helping him, of course. Then he'll

start burgling, probably be sent up for several years, come out with his spirit broken, and be a pickpocket. A person of that sort never works. You mustn't stare at him that way, Dory, or the Punch and Judy show will close."

Jack Harrington, a newspaper reporter, wandered up. Harrington had been dancing with Zoe, and flirting with her violently. He was a well-knit, average-sized, brown-haired young man, with a large mouth and narrow gray eyes which sadly needed glasses; but he never wore them except on the end of an effective broad black ribbon. He had nothing in the world save charming manners and faultless clothes, but he was a great favorite.

"You must have a high ball with me, Felix," he said.

"Not a thing, old man, thanks!"

"Oh, yes!" insisted Harrington.

He was always generously hospitable about these matters, when in other people's houses—especially since the advent of prohibition.

"Sh! I have had too much to drink already," whispered Felix solemnly.

"Sh!" mocked Harrington no less solemnly, as he went to pour the drink.

Dory excused herself and went over to talk to Zoe.

A moment later Felix found himself consuming a cool, refreshing high ball, which was rapidly followed by two or three more. All the time Jack Harrington was talking enthusiastically about the charms of Zoe, and Felix was wondering more and more feebly what would become of Dory if he left her here. He was asleep in a corner when Jules Blenner appeared.

Blenner, the pianist, was dark and slender, but not frail-looking. As he stood, his shoulders drooped a little and his chest seemed to curve in; but that was regarded, that season, as the smart way to stand. He wore his clothes with much distinction. His dead mother was a beautiful Levantine with the statuesque air so often seen in the features of those old races, and a likeness to her graced her son. A painter would have seen green shadows in young Blenner's dark ivory skin. A sculptor would have enjoyed his modeling, and the way his slightly pointed ears gave him a suggestion of a faun. His curly blue-black locks were cut close at the back and slicked off his broad forehead. His large brown eyes, set wide apart, were the man's best feature,

stamping him as what he was—the idealistic artist; but weakness marked his mouth and chin, and revealed one more demigod as being of the earth, earthy.

As he stood looking about the room, Blenner rubbed his hands in a way instrumentalists have, and Dory noticed that they were broad and muscular. He went over to the piano and began to touch the keys vaguely, still looking around the room. He caught the eyes of Dory looking wonderingly at him, and then he kept her in view.

The lights of the crystal chandelier and its myriad reflections in the mirrors grew fewer; then some one put them out entirely. To the glow of soft rose-colored lamps alone Jules Blenner struck the presaging chords of a Chopin nocturne.

So sympathetically did he follow his motif through its golden maze that the notes fell like so many warm tears from the heart of the tragic Chopin—like so many sighs of his hopeless sickness, so many pangs of his passionate love. All those restless, babbling people of a moment before had paused in their strange race through life. Each one relaxed in a chair, each one gazed into his dreamland—silent shadows let free by starving souls—souls that were now being fed by this magic music.

Swift, ominous thoughts came to Dory, but she rose above them. She was a caged bird set free. She gloried in it, and allowed herself to soar, rising above the ominous thoughts as she flew higher and higher into this new vivid expanse. She would formulate her ideas after it was over, when she would have a cozy chat with Zoe and would rest once more in that pretty gray bed between the silken sheets. Now she only knew the spell of the music and the still stronger spell of the brilliant young musician.

Soon it was over. The lights were shining brightly again now, the people had eaten and drunk. Jules Blenner had chatted with Dory and had said good night to her, touching the back of her hand with his warm lips—perhaps a moment too long—as he whispered:

"I—I played only to you! You made me really play Chopin to-night."

In her happiness, Dory searched for her friend Felix Grange; but he had left surreptitiously, having been advised by Jack Harrington that he was not "holding his liquor very well these days."

Jack had promised to give Dory full directions for the meeting on the morrow; this he did. Jack himself felt happy, for had not the impulsive Zoe yielded to his embraces in a dance—yielded her lips in a long kiss and told him that she loved him?

VI

At last Harry Balfour's stentorian voice bade the last person good night—or the last but one, for Silvia Van Twiller still remained. She wanted to borrow some money.

"I have something important to talk over with Bella. Do you mind if we retire to her boudoir for a little half-hour?" she said.

"Go ahead!" responded Harry.

Zoe laid a hot, trembling hand on Dory's arm.

"I'm going to my room, dear," she whispered. "Come in when you have your kimono on. There's lots to tell!"

"Well," said Harry, "I seem to be left all alone. I think Dory ought to sing me one or two little songs. I've never heard Dory sing."

"Yes, do," called out Mrs. Sand. "Go in and sing for him, Dory, if you are not too tired."

Now if there ever was an inappropriate time for singing, this, in Dory's mind, was it. She did not like the idea of being left alone with Balfour; but they were so kind to her that she would go. While she sang, she would think of the dear eyes of Jules Blenner—and that moment in which his lips had clung to her hand.

"I must go to my room," Zoe said. "I'll wait for you, dear."

Dory clung to her for a moment, then went to do as Mrs. Sand bade her.

Harry Balfour lighted one rose-colored light near the piano. He leaned back in a large chair, settled his receding chin into his collar, selected a cigarette, and waited while Dory sat at the piano, her hands poised over the keys.

In all his life he had never seen anything more desirable than this girl; but here he was, tied by a silent bond to a middle-aged woman—a woman who had subjugated him by manifesting her superiority. He knew he had not been bred a gentleman, but he hated Bella's superiority.

After all, what was poor Bella Sand now? He would look nice dragging around Europe with such a worn-out creature!

Unintelligent as he was, Balfour was conscious of the loyalty and sensitiveness of Dory's nature. If he was to get her, it must be now, before she fell under the spell of Bella. He was willing to marry her. He felt that the time had really come for making his choice; and he had been taught that a rich man could have any poor woman he wanted.

"A rich, attractive man like myself," he thought, "should be established with a beautiful young wife, a fine house where the best people would come, and a pew in a church where I'd be a pillar!"

He had always wanted to be a church pillar. There was something contemptible about this surreptitious life he led with Bella. With a grieved expression, he said to himself that it did not suit his true nature. He would abandon it all!

These thoughts passed through his head as Dory, thinking of her musician, sang some simple old songs. Finally she sighed and rose.

"You must be tired of my singing now," she suggested.

Harry Balfour went over and stood very close to her, breathing heavily.

"Tired of you?" he repeated. "Oh, Dory, you don't know what you say! For the first time in years my poor heart has been rested."

"Oh, Mr. Balfour, are you ill?" The girl tried to say it in a nonchalant way, feeling instinctively that he was growing sentimental. "You don't look it," she added nervously.

If she could only think of something funny to say! But one's wit—if one possesses that quality—is generally stupefied in such moments of need.

"Doreen," continued Balfour, "I may not look it—I try not to—but I am sad. My life is wrecked!"

"Oh, I'm sorry for you! I am indeed, Mr. Balfour!"

In anger, or sympathy, or any deep feeling, Doreen dropped into the melodious O'Moore brogue.

"Wrecked—wrecked!" he repeated hopelessly, nodding his big head with the weight of the word.

"Is there nothing to be done at all?" ventured Doreen.

He looked at her intensely with half-closed eyes, as he batted his white eyelashes and towered over her—a ludicrous, lugubrious giant.

"If I might tell you—confess, as it were—that would help, Dory."

The girl cringed from the familiarity of her name on his lips, and from the idea of being his confessor; but to human suffering one should give help regardless of the individual.

"Oh, yes, surely—if you wish," said she.

"Well, then," he began in a solemn voice, "when I was a lad I came to New York, as fresh and fine as you are now." Balfour paused and cast down his white eyelashes. "I met a woman. Do you know what bad women are, little Doreen?"

"Yes," said Dory frankly. "I have read of them in the Bible, and in French novels. I—"

"She was a bad woman," continued Balfour; "a bad woman who was magnificently, alluringly dressed and jeweled—just as they are in the novels. She appealed to my fine taste. I am refined. I can't help it—that's the way I am."

This a favorite formula of Balfour's. If anything puzzled, annoyed, or amused him, he would say:

"I like it—or I don't like it. I can't help it—that's the way I am."

To Balfour's mind this was a complete philosophy.

He put his cigar on a little ivory tray and leaned forward, humping his shoulders, putting his elbows on the wide elbows of the chair, and clasping his hands.

"She made me think she was absolutely necessary to me in New York. I knew nothing about big cities. When we appeared together in gay restaurants, everybody turned to admire her. She made me feel proud, for it was I who paid for her gowns and jewels. She had been cast off by another man just before I met her; and the man was right to cast her off!" he added bitterly.

"Oh, the poor thing!" sighed Dory instinctively. "You know, I often feel sorry for bad women. My grandmother always had sympathy for poor Mary Magdalen, and so have I."

But Harry Balfour was going on with his part.

"The other man had sense enough to see she was false; but I stepped in like an innocent lamb. She wasted my money willfully, wantonly. I spent hundreds of thousands on her apartment—all the fast set frequented it. I paid to be dragged to the gutter—to have my health impaired by

champagne. The fast set—do you know what that means, Dory?" he inquired, as he leaned eagerly toward her.

"Oh, yes!" replied Doreen quickly, hopping to ward off an explanation.

"It means," continued Balfour heavily, "that all the women are high-class wantons. Any women that a man meets in an apartment of this kind—he considers himself at liberty to treat as such."

"Oh, that's terrible! It's like a lion's den, or—"

"Doreen, don't be frightened," said he. "I have lived a life of sin with that awful woman until to-night. I, Henry Balfour, confess it to you, poor sweet thing that you are!"

"But—" began Dory.

He grasped her hand.

"I confess it all to you! The woman is Bella Sand—and this is the apartment!"

The girl drew back. She was deathly pale.

"To-night men looked at you and pitied you, thinking you had started in a life of shame because you were here. To-morrow they will call—you will see!"

Dory sprang away, but was held firmly by the wrist.

"As you value your honor, listen to me! We have only a few minutes. You have awakened me, Doreen. I love you—I can't see you in this mess! Your only chance is to come away with me. I know you have no money—have no protection. I am leaving to-morrow, and Mrs. Sand will not have a cent. She has squandered everything I gave her!"

"I don't believe it!" cried Dory. "I'll work to help her—I'll work my hands off!"

"Come away with me from this mess, Dory, and we'll lead an honest life, respected by everybody."

"Let me go!" whispered Doreen. Her throat was parched. "Let me go, I say!"

"Let you go?" returned Balfour, clutching both her hands. "You're asking me to let you go into the gutter! I tell you there's no chance here, no work in New York for a beautiful girl without money. You are not trained for work. You are up against a stone wall—do you understand? I am a rich man. I desire you, and should have you. It is inevitable. Men will want you. No matter what position you take, they will want you—not for your breeding, education, voice—bah! They will want you because you are a beautiful little crea-

ture with a wonderful mouth. I'm mad about you—mad—mad!"

He crushed her to him. Dory felt like a drowning person in his embrace.

"Let me go!" she cried, throwing back her head. "Let me go! I don't believe a word you say against Mrs. Sand. Oh!"

"Sh!" said Harry Balfour, releasing her. Putting an index finger over his mouth, he looked cautiously around.

Bella Sand stood in the doorway. She went over, took Doreen in her arms, and tenderly led her out of the room. At the door of the bedroom, she whispered:

"Zoe is asleep. Say nothing of this to her, dear. Go to bed and try to rest."

She looked very sad and very old as she moved away.

Dory turned her lock. Shivering, she stood in the darkness. Her pretty mouth, now contorted with disgust, felt dry and parched; but she could not moisten it with her tongue, for there was his horrible kiss! The first kiss—that exquisite thing of which she had dreamed! No, she would simply not allow it the name.

Softly she tiptoed to the bathroom, snapped on the light, and, putting a little alcohol in water, washed her lips. Then she bathed her pale face with cool, sweet toilet water. She peered in the mirror, half expecting a repellent sight; for surely she would see the face of a deceitful adventuress. She had betrayed Mrs. Sand, her best friend's mother, her own benefactress and protectress!

Only to see Zoe for a moment! Surely no one needed a friend more than she, just now; and she knew that Zoe would be sympathetic. But Mrs. Sand had asked her not to say anything.

She passed into the bedroom, leaving the door half open, and a faint light came into the place. She threw herself down on the bed, and with her face in the pillows thought of the lovely mother who had worked for her. Her mother had once been forced to act for herself in time of need; and how splendidly she had risen to the crisis! Her daughter would be worthy of her.

She went over to the window and gazed forlornly out. Noiseless automobiles were skimming along the gleaming road. One stopped at a palatial door up the street. Very solicitously a gentleman helped a beautifully cloaked woman up the steps.

The first floor became flooded with soft light behind the brocaded curtains. The door slammed; then the car, snorting a little at first, passed on.

Against a crevice in a great church, opposite, a man stood crouching. A policeman passed, swinging his stick. Then a thin woman in shabby clothes turned the corner, went up to the man, and spoke to him. He struck her, knocking her to the ground. Under the white lamplight, her face seemed young.

After a moment she picked herself up, straightened her scrawny feathered hat, and, saying something over her shoulder to the man, walked unsteadily up the street. Then the man, a hollow-chested creature, sank his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, pulled his cap well over his face, and followed sullenly after her.

More autos passed, and again the policeman, still swinging his stick, stalked stiffly by. Everything was quiet.

Dory shuddered. She pressed her face against the cool pane as the pageant of life passed beneath her. Dimly she imagined herself part of a monstrous something grotesquely out of scale with her own littleness. Then more clearly came the thought:

"No, it is I who am out of scale. I must be big enough to face all these conditions. This is a crisis in our lives—the life of poor Mrs. Sand, and Zoe, and myself!"

Then courage came to Dory. She folded her arms and straightened her young shoulders. With a vague thrill, she was conscious of the strength and freedom of youth. She would start by caring for Bella Sand and Zoe; for were not Mrs. Sand and

the luxury-loving Zoe to be left destitute? Zoe must be persuaded to go out into the world and earn her own living. Dory would consult Felix Grange as to the best course of action. He had been like a father to her once, and he would be again.

A flash of pleasure passed over her as she thought of Jules Blenner knowing Felix. In this way she would see him often—would see him soon. A sudden feeling of tenderness swept over her as she thought of Blenner. Beautiful hopes came, and they rested her troubled spirit.

The spell that Jules Blenner had cast! Dory allowed it to surge over her now, like a warm, relaxing shower. Suddenly she winced as she thought of Balfour's threat: "To-morrow men will call—you will see!"

What if Blenner thought that of her? Not until this moment did her present position appear in its real light. Ah, if he would only wait until she had seen Felix Grange! Felix would explain. She shrank from the thought of Jules Blenner disrespecting her; but she had no desire to control the fascination he exercised over her.

Then abruptly came the vital question—what should she do? It seemed to the girl like an ominous sentinel standing with a ring of keys before many locked, mysterious doors, demanding that she should instantly choose the right one, on pain of death. Her conclusion would open one, and she must enter it in the dark.

Typewriting—teaching—stage? The girl shook her head sadly; she was too tired to answer. All would be clearer in the morning.

(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

IN A QUIET HEART

LONG, long I sought for beauty—
Sought far, and found her not;
Long, long I sought for happiness,
And long for love I sought;

For happiness, love, beauty,
Through ways of noisy mirth,
Till I grew almost of a mind
They had no home on earth;

And then I turned from travel—
I turned to dwell apart—
And, soft as star-birth, found all three
In a quiet heart!

Harry Kemp

The Wisdom of Mr. Yen

AFTER NIGHT'S DARKNESS, LIGHT COMES FROM THE EAST

By Warwick Deeping

YOUNG Ferrol hung over the rail of Hungerford Bridge as the October dusk changed to blue night. The river, sliding beneath his feet, lost itself in opalescent mist and disappeared under the lights of the next bridge—lights that were a chain of yellow burrs clinging to the blue haze. London was putting on her brilliants and giving a touch of color to her lips before going out into the glare and the darkness to trouble men's hearts with her mocking eyes.

People hurried over the bridge—people who were going home. Alan Ferrol had no home. He rented a bedroom in a street off Tottenham Court Road.

"Who the devil cares?"

He had got beyond thinking that people ought to care. They didn't—that was the crude fact. The other immediate facts were that he received a shilling an hour at the Belgrave Rooms for acting as a dancing instructor, that his army gratuity had been spent, and that he was in love.

Impulse moved him on. He remembered that he had a hole in one sock, and that he would have to buy another pair before changing for the nightly dance at the Belgrave Rooms. Instructors were expected to turn up and add to their laundry bill by dancing encouragement into the company's patronesses. A nice job for a man who had been three times wounded in France, and had won the M. C. and bar!

He idled on, but above the entrance to Charing Cross Station he paused again and stood looking down into a gulf of light. He was conscious of brilliant transparencies, flashes of red, blue, and white, a swirl of foreshortened figures being sucked into the mouth of the tube station. A train panted out of Charing Cross and away across the bridge. Ferrol saw a girl stand for a moment and look up, her face a speck of pallor at the bottom of that luminous pit. The

sex of her shot up a flame at him. She disappeared, and he walked on.

Ferrol felt himself utterly alone. There were moments when the loneliness of London terrified him and fell on him like a panic. Supposing he hadn't a penny in his pocket, nothing to eat, nowhere to go? Supposing Kitty married that middle-aged ass with a Rolls-Royce car?

He paused at the top of the staircase leading down into Villiers Street, and something else paused behind him in the shadow of the passage. That something had been following Ferrol all afternoon, patiently, carefully, with the persistence of fate.

Ferrol bought a new pair of black socks, went to his room and changed, and walked to Belgrave Square, wearing an army overcoat that had been dyed a dark navy blue. He carried his dancing pumps, one in each pocket.

London was brilliant, derisively brilliant. Ferrol fell to thinking of the swaggering days when he had been home on leave, when this same overcoat had sat on him with a jolly adventurousness, and hung itself up at Moon's and the Piccadilly Hotel. Poor old coat! It had had such a fondness for taxis; but now—a sausage roll and a glass of milk, and a pair of shabby pumps in its pockets!

The porter at the Belgrave Rooms opened one of the glass doors for Ferrol.

"Evening, sir."

"Evening, Pakenham."

The porter—an ex-soldier—was about to close the door when a car drew up outside the white portico. A man got out of the car and ascended the steps. Pakenham stared at him.

"Another of these confounded Chinks!"

London was full of Orientals. They came to the Belgrave Rooms, and to Pakenham they all looked exactly alike.

"Gentleman's cloakroom on the right."

The Chinaman nodded. He might have been any age. He had a face like a serene and shrewd full moon. He was perfectly dressed, and he carried himself with dignity. He left his overcoat and opera hat in the cloakroom, bought a ticket at the office, and strolled into the lounge at the bottom of the red-carpeted stairs leading to the ballroom.

The lounge was full of people in evening dress. The Chinaman found a seat in a corner, and sat there watching the crowd. He saw young Ferrol standing at the bottom of the staircase, furiously irresolute, a young Prometheus chained.

Ferrol could not keep still. Once he turned and went halfway up the stairs, only to come down again. He lit a cigarette, threw it into one of the palm pots, and lit another. And all this because of a girl—a girl with a brilliant pallor, a pair of red lips, and a mop of blue-black hair!

She was talking to a middle-aged man in gold-rimmed glasses—a man who smiled a foolishly fascinated smile. When the girl smiled, he smiled; when she became serious, his face seemed to fall into vacant, ruinous gloom. Ferrol was watching them. This thing was his rival!

The Chinaman rose from his seat. He strolled through the crowd and placed himself near the couple. He heard what the man said.

"Simply ripping, you know! She'll do seventy to the hour, and you wouldn't know you were moving. Not quite as lovely as your dancing—what? Oh, you must come along in her—lunch at Brighton, and back in time for a hop at the Cri."

They moved toward the staircase. At the bottom of the stairs the Oriental saw a hand thrust out. Its fingers closed on the girl's arm. She turned sharply, almost angrily, and looked into the eyes of young Ferrol.

"I want to speak to you!" he said.

She nodded and smiled at her devotee.

"See you upstairs."

The Chinaman had turned his back. He appeared to drift aimlessly about the lounge with his eyes on the great glass doors, as if he were waiting for some one; but his driftings had a purpose. Youth was sparring with youth. They had drawn away toward an empty settee in a shaded recess.

"What's the matter?" the girl said.

"Kitty, if you dare to—"

The Chinaman had found a mirror in which he could watch the reflections of these two passionate young people. They were quarreling. He saw the girl tap Ferrol's sleeve with a finger.

"Don't be such a fool!"

"I'm not a fool; but if you let that chap take you—"

"I suppose I can choose my own friends! I won't have you making a scene here. You might have the decency to remember—"

Ferrol bent toward her and said something that made her stiffen and sit still. His eyes were burning. He looked half devil, half saint.

"Kitty, I can't stand this any longer! I care too much—that's what's the matter. I know you have a lot to bear, and other people to think of besides yourself; but I'm sick of this rotten life, for you and for myself. We have got to fight this out!"

Her hands fidgeted with her dress.

"It's hopeless," she said. "You haven't a brass farthing."

"I'd change that, somehow, if you would back me up!"

She shrugged, and glanced nervously across the lounge.

"We can't talk here."

"Well, let me walk home with you."

"I don't allow it."

"Oh, come! Well, to-morrow—some-where. What about St. James Park, or say the Admiralty Arch? Cut your lessons after four. I'll cut mine."

She hesitated. He touched her gently, appealingly, as if she were made of the fine and sacred stuff that his love wished her to be.

"Kitty, you don't know—"

"I'll come," she said.

She jumped up smiling, gave a shake of the head, and made toward the stairs. Alan Ferrol followed her as if some new happiness had come to him.

The Chinaman stood quite still for a while in the middle of the lounge. Then he walked slowly and deliberately to the long desk where half a dozen men and girls were busy with ledgers and tickets. He addressed one of the men.

"I wish to have dancing lessons," he said.

The clerk glanced up, but showed no surprise.

"Certainly, sir. Our hours are from eleven till six."

"Can I select my instructress?"

"It can be arranged, sir. Can I book you a course of a dozen lessons?"

"They will begin to-morrow at three?"

"Certainly, sir. What name, sir?"

"Mr. Yen."

Mr. Yen brought out his pocketbook. His face retained the same moon-like tranquillity.

"The instructress wears a red dress. Her name is Miss Kitty. Excuse me, I have forgotten the rest of her name. A friend recommended her to me."

"Miss Armitage, no doubt. It can be arranged, sir."

"I thank you."

Mr. Yen ascended to the ballroom. Finding a quiet corner behind one of the little round tables, he sat like a yellow Buddha watching this strange phase of life. The great room was full of queer post-war people, feverish, sensational, crudely material, and often very vulgar. Mr. Yen seemed to see everything and nothing—cheap souls in beautiful bodies, babies' eyes that glittered greedily, soft fabrics and soft bodies that were like cushions under which were hidden elusive youth. He was a philosopher, and yet he marveled.

His eyes followed the confectionery creature with her red mouth, her brilliant pallor, and her provoking, sensuous grace. She danced all the evening with her devotee, whose bemused and egregious bliss made Mr. Yen pity him.

"In these days," he thought, "our vampires suck gold instead of blood!"

He looked with a very different expression at Alan Ferrol, the unhappy youth caught in the fatal net of the money god—his manhood drowned in the shallows of a pair of dark eyes. Strange that a soldier—a young man who had faced death and conquered it—should be so blind! To stand poor and humiliated at the doorway of life while the porter at the gate salaamed to some fat huckster:

"Pass, you with the full purse, hero and patron, beloved of women! Stand back, you beggar soldier! You had better lie in the soil of Flanders than be here!"

Mr. Yen smiled.

"How like he is to his father!" he thought. "It may be that a soul has come from the same heaven and entered the body of the son."

Mr. Yen waited till the end. Then he disappeared. He entered the big car that

was waiting for him, and was driven by his Chinese chauffeur to his house in Orchard Square. He had taken the house furnished for six months, and this was the fifth month of his tenancy. Four months had passed before he found that which he had come to seek.

II

At three o'clock next afternoon Mr. Yen attended for his dancing lesson. He did not know that his selection of Miss Armitage had caused a considerable squabble among the young women who served as instructresses, or that gentlemen from the East were looked upon as prizes. A little French blonde had argued that it was her turn to be the friend of the "little yellow god."

"Pepita had the last. Miss Armitage had the rajah, before that!"

But Kitty, secure in her claim that she had been specially recommended to Mr. Yen, waited for him, secured him, and took him in hand as if he were a small boy, the precious son of wealthy parents.

Mr. Yen, imperturbable and unflurried, was led about by this young thing who made it her business to be gay and kind and fascinating. The whole affair was quite preposterous, of course, but Mr. Yen had come there to be preposterous. The motive was the only thing that mattered.

Between each dance they sat out and chatted.

"I am afraid I am verree clumsie."

She flattered him.

"You leave it to me—I'll teach you in six lessons!"

"But I am an old man."

"Nonsense! Nobody is old these days. How well you speak English!" She looked encouragingly into his bland and smiling face. "Is this your first visit to England?"

"Yes, but I know many English in China."

"And you came for a holiday?"

He nodded.

"I am an old man; I have much money; I spend it. I come to England to look for a wife for my adopted son."

"Couldn't you find one in China?"

"Not an English wife."

Miss Armitage laughed.

"Well, I'm blessed! Is he Chinese—your adopted son?"

"No—English."

"And what does he say about it?"

"He is a wise boy. He leaves it to me;

but he wishes her to be dark, and to dance."

Miss Armitage looked at him a little suspiciously. Was this little old yellow gentleman poking fun at her?

"You are a wicked tease!" she said. "I don't believe you!"

"My dear young lady, it is quite true."

There was more dancing—Mr. Yen performing like a stiff and stately doll. They had tea together and watched the other pupils—men and women of all sizes and ages. Ferrol was not present.

Mr. Yen behaved with the most perfect and gentle courtesy. He answered her questions, suffered her curiosity, and allowed her to extract from him the fact that he was a banker, an owner of steamships, a merchant, and what not. When he took his departure, she ran down to the lounge with him like an impulsive and unsophisticated child.

"You ought to come to-night. I'll dance with you!"

"It is a very great honor," he said.

She waited and watched him get into his big closed car.

"He's a gold beetle, all right! He ought to drop some of the dust!"

Remembering her appointment with Ferrol, Kitty changed her shoes and rushed off to it with a vague feeling of resentment. She liked Alan very well. Had he been rich, she would have liked him supremely.

They met about five o'clock at the Admiralty Arch. It was growing dusk. Mr. Yen was there, undreamed of and unnoticed. So absorbed were they in this most ancient of problems that half London might have followed them and they would not have noticed it. They walked and walked, and Mr. Yen walked with them, but at a little distance.

It grew dark, and these two youthful figures still drifted on, like two birds sparing in the air. They talked incessantly and at the same time. It is probable that they hardly noticed whither they were going.

Mr. Yen followed them into Whitehall, down Parliament Street, to Westminster Bridge. Here they turned to the left along the Embankment. Presently they came to a standstill, leaning against the wall and looking over the river. Mr. Yen slipped into a seat behind them, and, pulling his hat down over his face, pretended to be asleep.

He listened. The struggle between the spirit and the flesh reached its climax. The girl was suffering the scorching sincerity of a young man's love. Ferrol forgot to be tactful, delicate, persuasive, for he had reached that degree of passionate ferocity where the truth melts and flows like liquid metal.

"Do you think I don't know what life is? It is because I love that I want you to give up this horrible sponging game. That's what it is—don't you realize it? You must realize it!"

She answered him with fierce swiftness.

"Yes—all very nice for you! I wasn't brought up in lavender. I had to begin fighting early. A lot of mercy a girl gets from men! I'm hard. I can play the game."

"Kitty," he said, "you don't know what love is. Do you think it doesn't humiliate me to see you trading on these fools and cads? Look here, marry me, and I swear—"

He had hurt her, and she struck like a cat.

"No, thanks, Mr. Propriety! I'm fed up with the sentimental rot men talk. When I marry—"

"You'll marry some rich beast!"

"And why not? What about the French? You are always gassing about the French. Good-by!"

She broke away abruptly.

"Kitty!"

"Look here!" she said. "You are just a silly kid, Alan. You had better keep away from our place. I don't want you sulking there."

"By Heaven, I will keep away!" he said. "You don't know what I have offered you."

The girl hailed a strolling taxi and disappeared, while the man remained by the wall, his shoulders hunched up, his eyes fixed upon the river.

Some one touched him on the shoulder. He started; he thought that Kitty had come back.

"Alan Ferrol."

He stared into the calm, moon-like face of Mr. Yen.

"I beg your pardon!"

Mr. Yen removed his hat.

"The East comes to the West," he said.

"Twenty years ago the West came to the East. You were only half as high as this wall when your father sent you home to

England. Three years later he followed you, and I never saw him again; but I have seen his grave, his resting place—and I have seen you."

Ferrol continued to stare at the face of Mr. Yen.

"What do you want?" he began.

Mr. Yen took a card from his pocket.

"That is where I live. Come and see me. Your father was my friend. I am yours." He pushed the card into Ferrol's hand. "Not the river, my son—not the dark river! Remember that the sun always rises in the east."

III

He left Ferrol standing under a street lamp, very much astonished, and staring at the card. The young Englishman's dignity and social prejudices were a little ruffled and up in arms, for to be accosted by a Chinaman and warned against suicide was not flattering to his pride. This Mr. Yen, whoever he was, had been watching him, shadowing him. Who the devil was Mr. Yen, and what was he—Alan Ferrol—to him?

Ferrol was about to tear up the card and throw it away into the gutter when some faint memory restrained him.

"Yen—Mr. Yen! I seem to remember father using the name; but why all this mystery?"

Mr. Yen spent the evening at the Belgrave Rooms, under the wing of Miss Kitty Armitage. He did not dance, and she, deserting her devotees, gave up the whole evening to amusing him. She was merry, irresponsible, yet managing. Ferrol's searching sincerity, the anguish of a young man's love, had left no mark upon her. She looked like a doll—smooth, sleek, baby-eyed.

Mr. Yen, insisting upon her dancing part of the evening, sat in his corner and considered her. She filled him with pity—this little bird of prey, in love with herself and with no one else; but his compassion was dominated by a philosophy that was calm and inevitable.

"Her soul is very young," he thought. "She is only beginning, poor child; she has many lives to live before she learns. She does not suffer; she will be taught to suffer. Perhaps she was necessary to that boy. He needed the wound, the wisdom; but there it should end. Do I read the

will of the Great Intelligence aright? Fate is being kind to me—I help and I am helped!"

Mr. Yen had breakfasted. He sat near one of the windows of the house in Orchard Square, wrapped in a flowered silk dressing gown of silver, green, and peacock blue. This morning his wise old face showed a few wrinkles, but it was serene, contemplative, quietly expectant.

Presently he leaned forward in his chair. He was watching something or some one in the square—a young man walking up and down under the branches of the yellow-leaved plane trees.

"Pride!" he said to himself. "How proud youth is!"

It took young Ferrol half an hour to make up his mind on the matter of this visit to Mr. Yen.

At length he crossed the road and rang the bell. He was shown into a spacious London room, with Georgian furniture, and windows looking out upon the trees. Mr. Yen had turned his chair so that his back was to the light. He wanted to watch the face of Gordon Ferrol's son.

"You asked me to call on you."

Mr. Yen made a slight movement of the head.

"Sit down. This is not the house of a stranger."

Ferrol was not at ease. He was the young man wearing the harness of a sensitive pride, ready to resent patronage. He wore his poverty with a defiant spread of the shoulders.

Mr. Yen smiled at him.

"You will think it strange that an old Chinaman should touch you on the shoulder and ask you to come and talk to him. Life is strange, as soon as we cease to be conventional. You will find cigarettes on that table."

Ferrol opened the silver box. He was like a restive horse, but Mr. Yen had hands of silk.

"You wonder, perhaps, why I am here—why you are here. Nothing happens by chance, my son. Only the blind blunder against the thing they call chance. I will tell you a story."

He folded his hands and sat with his eyes half closed.

"Twenty years ago an Englishman and a Chinaman lived in a Chinese city. They were friends. It happened that the China-

man was afflicted by some sorrow or some unwisdom out of his own past. He suffered; he was brought low; he drank the cup of his affliction. Then the Englishman stretched out a hand and raised him up. The Chinaman, chastened and hopeful, began to prosper. He prospered exceedingly, and grew rich in the world's goods. After a time the Englishman went home to his own country to join his wife and child. The Englishman's name was Gordon Ferrol. He was your father."

Alan Ferrol was sitting straight in his chair.

"Both my father and mother are dead."

Mr. Yen bent his head and made a movement with his hands.

"I have seen the place where their bodies lie at rest. Your father was a good man, my son. He died poor, but he had the riches that are stored within. I was rich, and I, too, had a religion. It is possible that you have not studied the wisdom of the East, and I will speak to you briefly of my faith. We live not once, but many times, retreading the same path, but ever climbing upward little by little. The good that we do, the beauty that we own, are like precious stones threaded one by one upon the silk thread of our reincarnations. But we are ever in debt, and debts must be discharged, for every debt that clings to us means a longer treading of the path—more rebirths into casual bodies."

Ferrol looked at him in wonder—and was there not cause for wonder? To get your breakfast at a coffee stall, to wander about wearing out the soles of your last pair of boots, to see a city rushing to its daily money-grind, to know that over every shop was written, "Your money—or stay outside!" And then to walk in and sit in the tranquil room, to listen to a little old yellow-faced man uttering words of beauty and wisdom!

The room seemed full of Mr. Yen's serenity, of a presence that did not belong to the West.

"You mean to say, sir?" Alan Ferrol stammered.

The "sir" slipped out by a gracious and natural impulse. Young Ferrol had called many older men "sir," but never before, perhaps, had the word come to him so easily, so inevitably.

"My son, I grew old; I bethought me of this debt. The great war was over. I took ship, came to England, made search

for you, and found you. I cannot pay the debt to your father, but I can pay it to you."

Ferrol's face hardened for a moment.

"Do you mean you owed him money? He died poor."

Mr. Yen's eyes gave a momentary glitter.

"No—the money was paid long ago. The debt was a debt of the soul. My son, you will let me pay this debt?"

Ferrol got up and walked to the window. He stood there for a moment, frowning, troubled.

"I suppose you know that I'm a broken man?" he said.

He turned to Mr. Yen, who nodded.

"I, too, was broken; your father mended me."

Ferrol sat down again, facing the fire, and Mr. Yen watched him. There was a long silence between them—one of those strange silences during which many unseen things happen. The tranquil and benign wisdom of this old man was a serene atmosphere in which the restless soul of youth could rest with folded wings. Ferrol began to tell him everything—the war, his wounds, his disillusionment, his poverty, his humiliations.

"People forget," he said. "Sometimes I think that this civilization of ours is nothing but a great mill that grinds up men and grinds out gold."

Mr. Yen sat and dreamed.

"My son," he said presently, "in a month I go back to the East. There is a place for you there—work, honor, meditation. I am old, and I am lonely."

Ferrol looked at him for a moment, and turned again to the fire.

"There is some one else," he said, "whom I should like to save."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

Mr. Yen spread his hands.

"Is she of brass or of gold? Is she ripe to be saved? It may be that she has many lives to live."

Ferrol paused for a moment before answering him.

"Who knows? She is grist for the world's mill. I should like her to have her chance."

Mr. Yen sat very still. He seemed to reflect. Presently he began to speak, and with such gentleness and wisdom that even this young man's love could not be hurt.

"The soul of her must be proved," he said. "I, your father's friend, will prove it. My son, you must trust me."

"You are right," said Gordon Ferrol's son. "I will trust you!"

IV

DURING the next three days the little yellow Buddha was seen regularly at the Belgrave Rooms, shining benignly upon the child of the West. On the evening of the third day he threw open the gate of the garden wherein souls are proved. This girl should walk in the garden and choose the white flower or the red.

Mr. Yen left early. They had had supper together, and his car was waiting. He offered to drive Kitty Armitage to her home.

She gave him a challenging look.

"Well—perhaps!"

She went with him down the red-carpeted steps, through the brightness of the lounge, and out into the lesser brightness of the street. The door of the car was opened for her; she spread herself in the rich spaciousness, and looked happy. She noticed the silver holders full of flowers, and smelled some Eastern perfume that scented the rugs and cushions. She was conscious of a sense of gliding opulence, a processional splendor. Her crude, childish soul exulted. Her hands lay in her lap with the fingers curved like claws.

"Say, it's some car!"

Mr. Yen sat like a dreaming image. He felt the sparkle and glow of her young savagery.

"Say, tell him to drive around—you know—Leicester Square, and Piccadilly, and Park Lane. It's my swank machine to-night!"

Mr. Yen reached for the speaking tube and gave the driver his orders. They drove on, they glittered; she sat like a vain child, hugging her self-love.

"I suppose you have a great deal of money," she said.

Mr. Yen nodded.

"Riches are as dust, my child."

She laughed.

"I can do with some of the dust. When I've had my fling, of course—"

They came to the purlieu off the Edgware Road where Kitty lived with her mother and sisters. She did not think it necessary for Mr. Yen to see her home, or the street in which she lived.

"You can put me down here. I haven't far to go."

Mr. Yen understood her. He spoke through the tube, and the car drew up at the curb. Mr. Yen opened the door for her, and she slipped out.

"Good night! See you to-morrow!"

"Wait," he said. "You have forgotten your fur coat."

He lifted something from the seat, and held it out to her—a magnificent coat of sables. She had been sitting on it and had thought it a rug.

Their eyes met. The girl's were hard and steady. She laughed.

"Why, so I have! I say, you're a—"

She had taken the coat. Mr. Yen's face remained utterly without expression. He gave her a queer, enigmatic little bow, pulled the door to, and sat back in his corner. While the driver was turning the car to go back to Orchard Square, he had a glimpse of Kitty standing under a street lamp and examining the coat.

"Poor child!" he thought. "She must learn, but she shall not learn at the expense of Gordon Ferrol's son."

Alan Ferrol came to him the next morning, and Mr. Yen, sitting by the window and looking out at the yellow plane trees, spoke these words:

"Go to that place to-night. Watch for her to enter. You shall judge."

Ferrol went. He placed himself in a corner of the lounge and watched big Pakenham, in his livery of blue and gold, open and close the great glass doors.

It was a cold night. People flowed in, and presently she came—this Western child with the little sightless soul. She was flushed, triumphant. Her face, with its red mouth, and her coils of blue-black hair, seemed to float in the collar of her sable coat.

She exulted. The sleek, barbaric swagger of her challenged the eyes of her barbaric world.

Ferrol got up and went out.

Half an hour later he was standing before Mr. Yen's fire, seeing pictures among the flames.

"I have lost my last illusion!" he said.

Mr. Yen touched him again on the shoulder.

"My son, when illusions die, life begins. Your mate will come to you some day. Never doubt it!"

The Hard-Boiled Egg

THE HEART-RENDING CONFESSIONS OF AN AMATEUR CHICKEN-RAISER

By Will MacMahon

LOOK out for the locomotive! Bad turn at bottom of hill! Keep off—high explosives stored here!

The danger and the potential disaster visualized in the foregoing warnings lurk in what is known, alike to the innocent and the guilty, as the chicken business.

I intend no levity at the expense of a nation-wide industry, but write instead with a chastened and awe-stricken spirit. I have been a henery owner. Yea, I have been held helpless in the "fowl grip of circumstance"—the misquotation being from a poet aptly named Henley.

By the uneasy shades of storage eggs and embalmed broilers, every amateur hen-coop in this broad land of refrigeration and formaldehyde should fly from its roof the blue flag of the railroad car repairman. That emblem means:

"Out of order! Man underneath and defenseless! For humanity's sake, do not jostle!"

Even the farm wife's utility flock is a cruel delusion. She imagines that her motley hens subsist on grasshoppers, butterflies, lady, June, and potato bugs, and other insect aeroplanes, at no expense to the farmer. The cold arithmetic, however, of permitting ferocious fowls to roam unmuzzled proves that each one devours about nine dollars' worth of grain and vegetables in a summer. A pig could make a hog of himself doing that.

In a professional henery the egg-layer is expected to yield a net yearly return of six dollars. I have reason to suspect that the decimal point slipped its mooring, and that the correct answer is six one-hundredths of a cent.

More money has been lost by weak-willed men attempting to outguess the motives of the mechanical incubator than in

wagering which ones of several runaway race horses will not pass first under a wire. At the track the gambler contends with only the Irish stable owner, the Hebrew bookmaker, the negro jockey, and the relative velocity, bad temper, and lack of training of the thoroughbreds. The odds are much greater against followers of the chicken run. Cunning little lady peepers too often mature into old pullets, if not into downright rooster haters, that scorn to do anything worth cackling over. Many feminine-appearing chicks eventually turn out to be hoodlum cockerels, with no egg-laying aspirations whatever.

Individuals with henneries for sale advertise that no experience is required for a novice to make a success. They mean that to get rid of the business it is necessary that the purchaser shall have had no previous misfortune with chickens.

But I misinterpreted a certain advertisement, and my wife and three-year-old son went along to the country to watch their clever protector make crates of eggs grow where only chickweed was before. Our moving day was the 1st of April, the recognized opening of the henery year—and a significant date for a beginner to start something about which he knows nothing.

My purchase included a house and ten acres, an incubator cellar, a brooder house, and five hundred fowls. Four-fifths of the birds were trim and saucy white Leghorns.

"These are your laying machines," said the villain who sold them to me. "A hen of this here strain holds the world's record—three hundred eggs in one year."

It was an impressive statement. Three hundred, you know, is a perfect score at bowling. As my own average runs about one hundred and fifty, I felt a sudden

warm admiration for the white Leghorn breed.

Then the fairly well established fact recurred to me that there are three hundred and sixty-five days in a normal year. Could it be that the fowls observed Sundays and holidays by laying off instead of on? I was about to question their former owner, but he forestalled me with oratory on the Plymouth Rocks. There were present seventy-five of these haughty, plain-effect ostriches of the barnyard.

"From these here heavyweights," declared my Nemesis, "you'll get capons weighing from sixteen to eighteen pounds, and worth a lot more than common, everyday chicken."

I can neither substantiate nor discredit that assertion. One of the many things that I did not know about adolescent roosters, in time to take advantage of the situation, was that capons are entirely unlike poets in that the sixteen-to-eighteen-pounders must be made after they are born.

The remaining twenty-five members of my flock were plebeians, known locally as Dominicks, or garden scratchers, the title being predicated on whether they eat at home or fly over a neighbor's fence. They were of various colors and assorted sizes, and strangely care-free for creatures foredoomed to the cooking-pot.

I named my chicken business the Universal Egg, Broiler, and Capon Corporation. It is futile to christen for luck in a game of chance, and I should have known better. Among my honored friends are a free-verse female baptized Mary Ann and a professional pugilist answering to the insult of Percy. As I'm not one to keep a vile pun to myself, I shall explain that Mary Ann is a broiler and Percy a foul fighter. Ha, ha!

Trouble hatched for me on the very first day of my hennery ownership. I was happily viewing and hearkening to the scratching, dusting, sprinting, crowing, squawking, and cackling activities when the adjoining farmer strolled over to learn the brand of my smoking tobacco.

"Culls!" he remarked genially, pointing a gnarled forefinger at my beloved small, white birds. "Them Leg'erns is mixed—single an' rose-combs." Then he waved both of his ham-like hands toward my great gray fowls. "An' you got both barred an' ringed Plymcks, too," he gleefully added.

Now, I had noticed that many of the pert white ones carried thick, contused, or crumpled combs, but I had supposed that this was due to injuries akin to those that produced the cauliflower ears of Percy, the pugilist. I would not believe the slander against my Plymouth Rocks until the visitor picked from the ground two telltale feathers. One was regularly barred and the other nicely ringed.

Gone was my complacent vision of winning a blue ribbon for "best pullet," "best cockerel," or "best pen." Not for me would be the joy of receiving ten thousand dollars for one sad-eyed, middle-aged laying hen, constructed mostly of tonneau.

"Is that so?" I exclaimed brightly. "I'm going in for eggs and broilers, anyhow—and blood lines do not count there."

The old clodhopper smiled sourly.

"I think," said he, moving toward his own hennery of prize-winning Orpingtons, and blighting my tobacco and my hopes as he went, "that that there fancy terbacker of yourn tastes like it's mostly medder grass and molasses. Say, you better market them cross-breds as roastin' chicken, an' stock up with Belgium hares for the seal coat trade."

That last sentence contained valuable advice, but I thought the man was jesting.

The attitude of my other neighbors was misleading. They assumed that I could distinguish between truth and fiction in anything told to me concerning poultry.

If the village apothecary had not been curious, I would have fed a fatal dose of arsenic to my Plymouth Rock hens for the laudable, but misguided, purpose of whitening the brown shells of their eggs. I attempted to bribe him into silence by buying a full supply of home remedies, but his lips could not have been sealed with all the porous plasters in stock. For several ensuing days passing farmers derisively saluted me and my hennery, and guffawed until their horses began to run away.

About the middle of April my incubators went off their feed, or whatever is the technical term for mechanical indisposition in a hatching-machine's interior. A normal one hundred and three degrees while one is staring at the thermometer, and one hundred and thirty the moment one's back is turned, might do nicely for a clutch of the fabled phoenix, but the variation in temperature is not exactly motherly for hens' eggs.

I lost tray after tray, until the whole batch of fifteen hundred eggs was a fizzle. That looked to me like a curse on my coops, but now I know that it was a beatitude in economics.

To sustain a chick to the year-old state of egg production costs a dollar. That is the snag which wrecks so many small craft venturing into the chicken maelstrom. I shudder to think of what that latent debit of fifteen hundred dollars, hidden in incubatorial ambush, might have done to me. I should have been compelled to eat my young birds before they devoured my bank-roll.

My wife's sister, Cecilia, a nineteen-year-old prospective school-teacher, graduated from college in early June and spent her summer vacation on the chicken farm. Her rôle there was protean—sympathetic companion to a married elder sister, disciplinarian of a headstrong small nephew, and intellectual emery wheel against a brother-in-law's dull wit.

When I absent-mindedly misquoted some standard author, it was a beneficial shock to have that slender, brown-eyed slip of a girl recite the excerpt verbatim, with the exact literary status of the writer, and, if necessary, his career down to the day of his death. Such is the disturbing result of giving girls the same educational advantages that boys receive.

In advance of Cecilia's visit, I spread the rumor that I intended to "raise chickens and my wife's relations." As with many another spitefully humorous phrase, that one did not assay a grain of truth. Cecilia, however, found the farm a source of genuine merriment.

First, there was my vain attempt to establish a silence period in the coops after sundown. It was to be expected that the roosters would crow during the day, but they evidently regarded this opportunity merely as scale practice for their nightly concerts.

I did not object while my incubators were dry-kilning those ill-fated eggs. Often the shrill notes of the Leghorn cocks and the *boom-ah-h-h-h-boom* of the Plymouth Rocks awakened me in time to turn down the lamp wicks to a maternal temperature; but when the eggs were done, not wisely but too well, I no longer required a spurred and wattled alarm clock, and the after-dark uproar became simply maddening.

Somewhere I had read that a rooster could be muted by placing a board horizontally above his perch. The theory is that his tender comb collides with the obstruction when he straightens up to crow, and he returns to slumber with a voice unsatisfied and a welkin unrun.

I selected for my experiment an ancient and honorable drum major of a Plymouth Rock, a lordly basso profundo that I suspected of corrupting the younger male members of the choir. His hour had been two o'clock in the morning. After he once put a Wagnerian soul into the roosterish plea of "Tell me, are you tru-u-u-u-e?"—erroneously translated by careless listeners as "Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o-o!"—every he fowl on the place began to file the same vital query until sunup, when they could see for themselves just how their affairs of the heart were progressing.

Well, midnight was near when my particular rooster unguardedly raised himself, perhaps to take a fresh toe hold on the perch. He must have bumped his crotchety old cranium a pretty hard rap.

I awoke with a start and leaped to the window. From the turmoil in the chicken yard, I would not have been surprised to see out there an elephant, a rhinoceros, and a lion in a three-cornered battle royal to the death. If ever an infuriated fowl talked right out in public, that old rooster did. Much of his language seemed too profane to print, and all of it was aimed at the owner of the chicken farm.

"The lowbrow who placed that hard thing right over my unguarded head," he said bitterly, "is a liar, a horse thief, and a bootlegger! His house is on fire—yes, on fire! Robber! Kidnapper! Murderer-r-r-r!"

I stood his insults as long as was humanly possible, and then I sallied forth to slay him in his sin. It being a stifling night, I wore only my bedroom slippers and a—er—a toga-like arrangement of linen.

By now there was sufficient bedlam in the coops to attract the attention of every weasel, mink, and red fox within a radius of a mile. This natural handicap to the poultry business was discovered at day-break, when we made a tally of the dead and missing from the flock. Cecilia, the mathematician, figured that the wild game of the neighborhood owed me exactly ninety-nine dollars and seventy-five cents.

I was an assassin at heart when I locked

that abusive Plymouth Rock into the acre of open yard and doggedly set out to run him down. I once was a cross-country devotee, and my favorite distance had been six miles; but that outlaw rooster must have been in secret training for a marathon. I pursued him in vain until utter exhaustion compelled me to abandon the chase.

The feathered old reprobate still retained his capture-defying stride, but the exasperating squawk of him had diminished to the squeak of a penny whistle with a broken reed. If the Society for Psychical Research could have had his testimony, the existence of ghosts would probably be regarded as fully established. That frantic bird could have testified to the horrific fact of a wild-eyed, rock-throwing, club-hurling apparition in a nebulous robe—a monstrous, shrieking spirit that radiated malicious animal magnetism and erupted violent language at each gigantic leap.

Comrade wife blamed my unsuccessful chase on a too loyal use of pipe tobacco, which solace of the mind she condemned as detrimental to lung power.

"Is that so?" I retorted. "The all-day runners of the African jungle smoke continually."

"They are not handicapped with night-gowns," she rejoined, and we heard a shriek of amusement from Cecilia immured in her room.

"What's so confoundedly funny in there?" I demanded, pounding on the door.

"If human beings had knee hinges swinging forward like a chicken's, instead of backward as in the hippopotamus," Cecilia replied, "they could run faster!"

"Is that so?" I shouted. "Well, tell it to the Amateur Athletic Union."

I was quite pleased with my comeback until she spoke again.

"It wouldn't do you any good," she said sweetly. "That rooster outran you because he isn't yellow! Good night! Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o-o!"

"A crowing woman—" I began darkly, to my wife.

"You mean a whistling hen," she suggested meanly.

II

DIM, religious light and a little soft music now. Grim tragedy is about to stalk across this page.

Production ceased in the plant of the

Universal Egg, Broiler, and Capon Corporation as if the hens had joined the Industrial Workers of the World. Then pestilence attacked the various flocks. Female and male, adult and young, took in rapid sequence every prominent ill mentioned in the poultry journals and several obscure ailments as yet uncatalogued.

It was a splendid opportunity for the study of chicken sickness, but by the time I learned the remedy for each particular symptom the coops were depopulated. Gone forever were the single and rose-comb Leghorns, the barred and ringed Plymouth Rocks, and the variegated *hoi polloi*. Silence claimed the once noisy hennerly as if one's ears were stuffed with cotton.

But Mother Nature, abhorring the well-known vacuum, meanwhile had proceeded privately to alleviate that dearth of crow and cackle. A small brown hen, of no certain strain, but as maternal as a lady guinea pig, had "stolen a nest" under the back porch of our house shortly before the plague set in.

There, on eggs supplied in large part by sympathetic sister birds, she brooded through the interminable darkness. Her heart, no doubt, had quaked at every foot-fall overhead in fear that some fiend in human form was coming to take away the precious hatching and offer it as a sacrifice to the fiery artificial incubator. And now it was the twenty-first day.

The brood was composed of fourteen lively, chirping puffballs, most of them canary color, several pure white, two mottled gray, and one coal black. Overly nice persons will not see scandal in this if they remember that those eggs were from various hens.

I took up part of the porch flooring to learn how many eggs had failed to hatch. Nothing but broken shell was in the nest. Without the aid of kerosene lamp, thermometer, rheostat, or moisture pad, that young and inexperienced mother hen had made a progeny record of one hundred per cent.

Alas, the next morning after the great event there were present thirteen chicks, a count verified by half a dozen censuses—so bewilderingly did the babies go through their maneuvers round about the hen.

"A rat must have taken one," comrade wife declared.

"A tat tatch a wat," sagely suggested our three-year-old heir.

Accordingly, I borrowed the farmer-neighbor's tortoise-shell Tom, and put him in the wire-inclosed run overnight.

The following daybreak revealed only nine chicks in the brood. It was easy to count them now, because they were tired and dazed. The excited hen had bluffed the cat into a small tree in the yard. Sir Thomas looked a picture of contentment, and was purring like an automobile engine that purrs like a well-fed cat. Wisps of down between his deadly claws were evidence that his very late dinner, or quite early breakfast, had been four chicks *au naturel*.

I sent that smug murderer on the high gear to his home. Never another tame cat ran as fast as he. His leaps were those of the frightened kangaroo, and he uttered a blood-curdling banshee wail at every jump. His unprecedented speed was partly due to my use of a self-starter fashioned from a paper bag and a handful of dried beans and tied to the treacherous feline's tail.

But the chicken farm was to have another disastrous experience with a domestic pet. Soon after Tom's dazzling departure a stray English bulldog swaggered into the front yard.

If this animal had been of the sterner sex, we would have guessed its title as Brutal Bill, or Bob the Bite; but it appeared that the stranger was not of that gender, and a gentler name had to be found.

"Call the dear, sweet thing Amazon," suggested Cecilia. "The name would fit her like a plaster cast!"

"Is that so?" I said. "Her name is Pieface—isn't it, friend wife?"

"No," friend wife replied.

Amazon was the color of a red-headed man's mustache. When she yawned, which was frequently, her ridiculously undershot jaw opened like an old-fashioned carpet-bag. I would not have been astounded on these occasions to see fall from it a boot-jack, two or three woolen shirts, a pair of butternut trousers, a coonskin cap, and such other personal articles as usually inhabited the capacious forerunner of the leather valise.

Amazon's brow was as deeply furrowed as a clay road in the spring. It gave on-lookers the impression that her thoughts were not only concentrated but excruciatingly painful.

Her tail resembled the handle of a jug—a "second" which had been twisted in the

baking beyond hope of repair, and which came on the pottery market by mistake. This she wagged occasionally, but it was so faint a "welcome" semaphore compared with the downright "keep out" notice of her massive head that pedestrians warily passed by on the farther side of our road.

I locked Amazon in the chicken yard that first night, not by any chance to kill rats, but to guard against the highly improbable return of the banished cat.

At dawn the mother hen awakened us with the wildest clamor permitted a non-crowling bird. She had a tragic reason.

In the night, probably for companionship, Amazon had snuggled into the small coop with the little brown hen. Then, in doggy dreams of shaking sundry herds of enraged Andalusian bulls by their tender noses, she rolled over on the chicks and smothered them.

"Here is where a bulldog breaks the greyhound record for high velocity," I declared. "I shall tie a tin can charged with pebbles to her tail!"

"Your husband," said my sister-in-law to my wife, "has the courage of a lion-tamer. Think of the risk in attaching a string to that infinitesimal caudal appendage! Amazon's jaws would make a good working model for a bear trap, and perhaps it would be nobler—and safer—to forgive her. Also, she is undoubtedly a valuable animal, and a substantial reward may be paid for her return."

"That is so," I conceded grudgingly; "but I'll tell the poultry world I'm done with chickens. Never again shall I act as midwife to an incubator or wet nurse to the artificial chick. This business has finally gone to the dogs!"

III

THE bereft presence of the small brown hen saddened me so much that I soon decided to slay her. On a Saturday afternoon preceding the ordained chicken potpie of Sunday, I tied the docile bird's wings and feet, suspended her head downward, and poised myself grimly to wield the slender, shining lancet with which modern poultrymen do their fowl deeds.

"The hatchet is in the woodshed," friend wife suggested.

"You can strangle the poor bird with the bare hands of a murderer at heart," her sister added; "but please desist, and let us eat pot roast to-morrow!"

"No!" I growled morosely. "I've been thwarted on eggs and broilers, but pot pie is within my reach!"

I closed my eyes and jabbed energetically with the lethal steel. There was a deal of bloodshed—quite enough to convince me that a live chicken cannot be divorced from its vital forces by stabbing a man in the left thumb.

From that painful moment I date a crystallized belief in the good judgment of my wife and my wife's sister. While the former tearfully bandaged the wound, and the latter smilingly set free the pardoned captive, it never occurred to me that a strong right hand could still grasp a hatchet or the neck of a chicken if need be.

We were in the midst of the pot roast next day when the farmer neighbor dropped in on his way from the village post office. He had a letter for me from my former employer, who had written that he wished to be supplied each week with two dozen genuine new-laid eggs "from your flourishing hennerly."

As by now I was rather seriously thinking of getting a regular job, and had marked the gentleman as my future boss, I hastened to bargain for a selected twenty-four from the caller's Orpingtons, and on Monday I personally escorted them to the city.

"There must be oodles of profit in the chicken business," the purchaser remarked enviously, as he handed over eighty cents—the current wholesale rate for two dozen "near-by extra firsts."

"Is that so?" I began, but suddenly realized that it would not be tactful to explain that the twenty-four eggs had cost me a dollar and twenty cents, and two dollars to deliver. "Er—I mean, that is so!"

"What a graft!" he continued musingly. "Some sweet day I'll sell out here and go to the country to live. Eggs warm from the nest! Broilers playing around within a hop-step-and-jump of the kitchen range! And—and pure milk and unadulterated butter! And—and—let's see—oh, yes—natural comb honey! That's the place for a man to invite his soul!"

That sounded to me more like the raving of a chef than the ecstasy of a nature-lover, but I urged him on.

"Uhuh! And the wide vistas!" I suggested. "The tender dawns! The—the glorious sunsets! And—and—let's see—oh, yes—the fresh air!"

"Uhuh!" he agreed dreamily. "And home-grown vegetables!"

This being his peroration, I decided to put off until another week my confession that I was fed up on the country and needed a city job to keep from starving. Moreover, several customers were just then invading the private office for their daily matching of coins to see which one of them would stick the boss for luncheon for all. He never won.

"Gentlemen, look!" the intended victim exclaimed. "Eggs! Strictly, positively, absolutely fresh! To-morrow morning I shall have two soft-boiled. No—three scrambled! No, no—by the great American hen, it 'll be a four-egg omelet! I'm not matching to-day—got a date with the missis. So long, boys!"

When I went up to the city the next week with another unprofitable two dozen, the one thing that saved me from serious bodily hurt was the boss's absence at a ball game.

"Oh, you village cut-up!" the trim little blond typist ejaculated. "I'll say that was a clodhopper trick you put over on the old man! How come? You used to have a refined sense of humor when you worked here."

"His wife telephoned to say that if any of the employees were in on the smart Aleck joke, they could consider themselves fired," the crabbed old cashier added.

"Elucidate!" I begged. "A diagram with footnotes, please!"

"Well, when their chef had everything ready for the omelet but the eggs," the cashier explained, "it was discovered that your two dozen had been boiled for at least thirty minutes. Then the boss remembered that you assured him that Orpingtons were better than Plymouth Rocks as layers. You meant harder! Or maybe you had in mind the rock that the Pilgrims landed on?"

"I'll say he had!" the typist agreed.

"Aha!" I exclaimed. "That was the stunt of some customer whom the old man refused to take out for a feed. He sneaked those new-laid out of the office, had 'em boiled to an ivory finish, and brought 'em back before the boss returned!"

"I'm a quick fibber myself," the girl remarked admiringly; "but you discourage me!"

"It was at noon next day that your former employer turned against the chicken

business forever," the cashier continued significantly. "He brought four of your hard-boileds to the office in the morning, and announced that any hungry customer dropping in could watch him eat 'em. Before twelve o'clock there were at least twenty of our best clients crowded into the room, all greatly amused over some secret that they hadn't shared with the employees."

"You might have wised me up!" the young lady reproachfully said to me.

"Cut out the blank look!" the cashier added. "Well, the boss made ready for the feast, and the spectators surged forward like a mob on the stage. Ordinarily a man cracks the shell of a hard-boiled egg on the desk, the arm of a chair, or even his knee; but the boss, a bit excited by the crowd, nicked one on the top of his head."

"I see!" I interposed. "The same practical joker had substituted a china nest egg, and the old man nearly brained himself, eh?"

"I ask you!" the little blonde appealed to her fellow employee. "Ain't this guy the goods when it comes to denying that the world is round?"

"It was a natural egg," the cashier proceeded patiently, "but entirely uncooked—and a bit stale, to say the least."

"What—what happened then?" I inquired feebly, after the typist's amused shriek had faded into giggles.

"For a few seconds the boss sat stunned, a cascade of yolk and shell and the white of the egg coursing down his neck. Then he turned his famous bad-account purple, and I stepped into my cage to escape the storm. Fortunately the three remaining eggs were neither hard-boiled nor china, or fatalities might have resulted," the cashier concluded.

"He wrecked my skirt," the girl declared; "but he came through later with a check for this dress. Like it? Too short?"

"Yes—no!" I replied earnestly.

"And he had to pay for renovating the customers' suits," she continued, dimpling prettily for some obscure reason.

"I'm as innocent as a day-old chick," I declared. "Some customer must have switched the eggs twice."

"If a day-old chick can tell a girl that her skirt can't be too short," the little blonde remarked, "I'd like to hear a grown up rooster talk!"

"Is that so?" I remarked, being unable to think of any better retort.

"That is so!" she came back sharply. "And I advise you to keep away from the boss for the remainder of your earthly eggs-istence!"

Thus, without rehiring me, the old man had again accepted my resignation. I had to sell the two dozen selecteds on hand to a city grocer for a total of sixty-eight cents. Every one in the office pointedly declined to buy at any price. Give an egg a bad name, and throw it!

IV

THERE remains little more to tell of my departure from the chicken business. September arrived, with the necessity of providing more than an egg-and-broiler make-believe for sustenance until the hennery season reopened in the following spring. I left wife and small son to the management of Cecilia and the protection of Amazon, and went away a thousand miles to salaried employment.

The very first letter from home contained a welcome surprise. The owner of the English bulldog had located and claimed her, and paid a reward of one hundred dollars. If you please, the animal was a champion by bench show right, but her everyday name was Sal. Friend wife added:

P. S.—Amazon-Sal's owner is a young bachelor, blond and huge—Cele's physical opposite. They talked bulldogs and sires and dams and blood lines and outcrosses until I was tempted to flee from the porch.

P. P. S.—He remained for dinner at her insinuation and my invitation. Our farmer neighbor sold us two broilers—a dollar each, the unconscionable pirate!

At my cheerless boarding house, uplifted by that letter, I bragged about Sal to a fellow victim of the prune and the fried liver. That man was disputatious. Bulldogs, to him, were purely ornamental. He nominated as utilitarian canines French poodles, old English sheep dogs, and other hairy breeds.

Later I learned that the gentleman held the exacting position of husband-manager of a lady hairdresser. If the object of his devotion and vocation had been the inventor of a depilatory, he probably would have assaulted me with bare knuckles to prove that the Mexican hairless is the ideal dog.

It was the middle of January when a telegram urged me to hurry home. I made the best race possible by rail and village jitney bus, but the tireless stork distanced me. An exquisite new sister for Robert, thank you!

I also found that friend wife had added the Amazon-Sal reward money to about a thousand dollars' worth of Cecilia's ideas. There was an amazingly prolific mushroom cellar where the barren incubators had been, and the steam-heated brooder building had become a conservatory for the modest but modish winter violet.

Furthermore, a dozen prize Orpington eggs had been set under the little brown hen, and she hatched out all but two. Eight plump pullets and two tall cockerels were making mental notes of the coop locations, in the serene conviction that in the spring they would crowd the yard with their descendants.

It was represented to me by my immediate family—tiny Dorothea communicating her wish with ingratiating and prehensile fingers—that all the plant needed was a strong man able to withstand the

fascination of gambling against that fell instrument of gallinaceous race suicide, the mechanical hatcher. I therefore decided to turn my vast talents to the care of a cow, and bees, and the garden—and resigned my distant job.

In April, friend wife and I hired the farmer neighbor's fifteen-year-old son to manipulate our incubators. That lamentably freckled lad averaged all of eighty-five per cent success with settings bought haphazard from dealers. It is a gift, like wagging one's ears or selling a humorous story. My amateur-hating mechanical hatchers lacked roller feet, or they would have followed that young professional about the place.

Wherefore, novice poultrymen, take heed! Engage experienced help—or raise mushrooms and violets. A cheerful wife is no handicap, but do not rely too greatly on an educated sister-in-law. Mine promptly deserted the farm to become bride and manager of Amazon-Sal's wealthy owner. That shows the futility of a college career. She could have landed him with a grammar school diploma.

COSMIC FRIENDS

THREE sisters have I loved—

April and May and June;

And four wild brothers that blow

Across the hills the moon.

North, south, and east and west they blow

The blossom of the moon,

Making a merry tune;

Four wild brothers that go

Forever to and fro—

Arctic, antarctic, snow,

And tropic noon and noon.

Seven seas have I for friends,

That flash along the lonely ends

Of frozen cape and palm-fringed shore,

Singing and singing evermore;

And tossing to and fro the stars,

And floating worlds and broken spars.

Sisters three, and wild winds four,

And seven seas—I ask no more

For friends of mine,

Save in the sky the sun to shine!

Richard Le Gallienne

Morally Wrong

A NEW YORK ROMANCE OF STOLEN JEWELS, SHADY FINANCE,
AND FAMILY HOTEL SOCIETY

By Louis Lee Arms

JIMMY MCGARVEY lived at the Hotel Embassy, on West Fifty-Seventh Street. Here the permanent guests practiced a pleasant form of self-deception. They liked to think—being just out of the white-light district—that they were one big family. It was a little funny, a little pathetic. There was such naïve pretense, such artful concealment!

But New York is cold, especially to permanent guests in hotels of the lower first and upper middle classes. Those who were of the charmed circle hung on desperately. It afforded a little warmth in a magnificent ice house.

Jimmy McGarvey was a permanent; but he stayed tantalizingly on the outskirts of the circle, and they could not draw him into it. He piqued their curiosity. Because of his spotless linen, his taste in cravats, the cut of his clothes, and his enviable hours, they thought he was a stockbroker. As a matter of fact, he was a detective.

The stage and fiction had set a helpful precedent for Jimmy. In books and on the boards the detective was either a common flatfoot or an extraordinary psychic artist. Jimmy was neither. At the office they had dubbed him "the society dick"; but he didn't like that. Yet it was true that he handled most of the cases among Father Knickerbocker's best families that sent fat fees into the downtown offices of the Burnham Agency, Incorporated.

Indeed, the circle at the Embassy would have been shocked had it actually known Jimmy. The circle was self-shocked several times in an average season. Now it was the retired manufacturer vaguely from the West, who proved to be a defaulting cashier from a national bank in Pittsburgh. Again, a garrulous widow from somewhere

down South would be whisked away one morning into a retreat for morphine maniacs.

The circle prattled prodigiously on such occasions. Its members looked at one another with eyes that tried plainly not to say "Who's next?"—and failed. Then they settled down to a restless, expectant normal.

It was because Dorothy Phillips was of the circle that Jimmy rather avoided her.

He would have liked to know her. She was odd-looking, and there was that in Jimmy which responded strongly to the unusual. Her hair was dark, and bobbed. She had a rather broad, animated face. Her eyes were dark and gorgeous. Her business, Jimmy understood, took her down into "the Street." He imagined she deferred to the circle in order to forestall downright hostility. A woman had to do that.

He saw her now as he leaned against the cigar counter. It was Saturday afternoon, and spring. The metropolis was astir with the extra activity of the week end. She handed her room key to Biggs, the clerk, and turned briskly toward the exit. She was going to a *matinée*, probably.

Jimmy liked the free, firm way she walked. He wished he was with her; but he was getting ready to handle a case. The governor, by telephone from the downtown office, had instructed him to meet Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe at the Plaza.

"She'll wear a squirrel-fur cape and an old-rose turban," said his employer. "At three o'clock she'll be sitting near the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance. She's got nothing but. See what she wants."

In other years Jimmy would have been keenly anticipatory; but he was tired of the troubles of the rich. The rich were

usually ungrateful. They used him for their own ends—not always honorable ones—and promptly forgot him. Sometimes, when the case grew hot and the way dangerous, they turned on him. It had frequently happened in matters of domestic infelicity.

"Mrs. Forsythe?"

Jimmy addressed a woman of twice his own age.

"You are Mr.—"

"McGarvey, madam."

"I remember. Mr. Burnham said it would be you."

She was striking, Jimmy decided, without being at all attractive. She was externally a product of the avenue, turned out by the first floors of gowns and furs to the upper stories of manicurists and hairdressers. She reminded him of a paper orchid.

In the Orange Room she lit a straw-tipped cigarette. Then she plunged into her story.

"Of course," she concluded, "I didn't want to notify the police. They are so—so incompetent."

Jimmy nodded mechanically. He knew why those with whom he dealt never notified the police. They were afraid. The police meant publicity. Publicity meant—there was usually a skeleton rattling around somewhere.

"How much was the necklace worth?" he asked.

Her eyes grew hard.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars."

Jimmy again nodded mechanically, and concluded that she might have paid fifty thousand for the pearl necklace.

So far, the case was quite in the usual manner. She and her husband had attended a ball in the East Sixties. Afterward she had placed the jewels in a wall vault in her boudoir.

"I was very tired. I may have forgotten to lock the safe."

Jimmy nodded. He understood her to mean that there had been wine.

"And," she continued, "the next day the necklace was gone."

"Your servants, madam—do you suspect them?"

It was a regular formula. Mrs. Forsythe's eyes narrowed. For a moment Jimmy thought she was going to scream.

"Mr. Mc—"

"McGarvey, madam."

"Mr. McGarvey, I haven't employed you to discover the thief. I know who took my necklace."

"Indeed?"

"It was my husband."

Jimmy rolled his cigarette between thumb and forefinger.

"It usually is the husband," he reflected. "Saves me a deuce of a lot of trouble!"

"My husband," she repeated. It seemed to Jimmy that there was something of hysteria in her voice. On second thought he analyzed it as triumph. "What I want you to find out is why he took the necklace." Again her eyes grew hard. "I suppose there's a woman."

"I see!" said Jimmy.

He envisaged J. Clement. His wife's junior, no doubt, by fifteen years. These men who married for money—and earned it! Why wasn't the keeper of the gold bags a little more careful of her primary attraction?

"I want to know who the woman is. Find out about her. I want to know my husband's relations with her."

Gold bags of either sex often wanted to know things like that in New York. She relaxed.

"It's rather amusing," she said.

"What?" he inquired politely.

"My husband didn't get the pearl necklace. He took the paste copy."

She paused expectantly.

"That is amusing," Jimmy agreed.

"My husband recently tried to borrow a large sum from me. I had rather thought something was up. I transferred the genuine pearls to the paste jewel-box, and *vice versa*."

Jimmy smiled approvingly.

"Some bird!" he reflected.

II

THE first shadow and the second shadow, respectively Pete Monahan and Adolph Link, stood on the south curb in Wall Street. In front of them a factitious cliff shot thirty-two stories into the air. Somewhere between earth and sky was Jimmy McGarvey. The two shadows had nothing to do but wait until he appeared with the subject. The agency knew those whom it investigated as "subjects."

Pete and Adolph had been waiting forty-five minutes, but they didn't mind. Their professional lives were largely devoted to

waiting. They had become expert in knowing how long they could linger in any given spot without becoming unduly conspicuous. Rather an interesting life, they thought.

"About time," growled Pete, from the corner of his mouth.

"I'll say so," muttered Adolph.

The revolving doors again began to hum. Jimmy McGarvey stepped out of one compartment. He was followed by a lank, blond individual with bulging eyes. The lank blond wore a tiny mustache, known across forty-eight States as "trick."

Jimmy gazed impersonally at the two shadows. Then he caught step with his companion and legged it briskly toward Broadway.

Pete and Adolph followed with something less than professional caution. Shadow work was a pipe on crowded streets.

"I think we might be able to do something in the matter of those oil leases," Jimmy was saying.

"Right-o," replied the lank blond.

Jimmy was perfectly at home engineering a mythical business deal. Experience had taught him that up to a certain point it was safe to say almost anything in the downtown district of New York.

They paused at the door of a Broadway office building.

"I'm lunching here," said J. Clement Forsythe.

"I'll drop in on you the latter part of the week," replied Jimmy.

They bowed and parted. The two shadows took up the pursuit. Their quarry had been delivered to them.

Late that afternoon Pete and Adolph reported at the office of the agency.

"They's a skirt all right," said Pete, with a grin.

"Yep!" agreed Adolph.

"Who is she?"

"Name's Phillips. She's in the Newtex Oil Company, on Rector Street."

"Wouldn't wonder if she was the boss," added Adolph. "Looks like he's playing big game."

An alarming thought was edging up in Jimmy's mind.

"Phillips?" he said. "What's her first name?"

"Little Dottie," answered Pete, with a toothless grin.

Women who crossed the path of the agency were always an amusing matter to Pete.

"You mean Dorothy?" asked Jimmy sharply.

"That's it, Mac."

Jimmy relaxed.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he said slowly.

"What's the matter, Mac? Do you know her?"

The society dick shook his head.

"Keep tabs on Forsythe till you hear from me," he said.

"What about the dame?" objected Pete.

He had hoped for that assignment himself. Jimmy flushed.

"Pete, you ain't going to get very fat around here calling women 'dames' and 'skirts.' I said to keep tab on Forsythe—get me?"

The two shadows retired to the corridor.

"He's gettin' all swelled on hisself," complained Pete bitterly.

"Aw, Mac's all right," said Adolph.

III

THERE was nothing to do but invade the permanent circle. Jimmy felt that he had to meet Dorothy Phillips. She might crack, as they said at the agency. A woman so often revealed a knowledge of traps by her transparent avoidance of them. It would be an ideal, however.

As he came out of the elevator, he beheld the circle gathering for the evening's exercises. Among them was Lydia Farnham. Her gold tooth was resplendent under the rays of an amber light overhead. Jimmy had once met Lydia.

The booming-voiced husband of Mrs. Joyce was telling of a funny incident that happened once in Rutland, Vermont. Mrs. Phipps was explaining why she always bought her shoes at Carlsen's. In ten or fifteen minutes old Henneberry would begin to warm up on the iniquities of the income-tax laws.

Jimmy slipped quietly into a seat beside Lydia.

"Why, Mr. McGarvey! It's so seldom you stay around the hotel in the evening, isn't it?"

Lydia adopted a now-you-naughty-boy manner toward younger men. She thought it pleased them, and it gave her a certain undeserved suggestion of sophistication.

"I have been on the go a bit lately," Jimmy replied.

She smiled knowingly. She knew there was always so much behind the simplest statement that a young man might make.

The circle had lynx eyes for those outside the pale, and it shot sidewise, semi-hostile glances at the newcomer. Then it redoubled its effort to show him what he had been missing until now. Lydia introduced him around. Her gold tooth fairly jiggled.

"You know," she said archly, when they were seated again, "there's a young lady in this hotel that I want you to meet."

"No? Who is she?"

"Oh, a friend of mine," said Lydia vaguely.

Men were so abominably direct! She wanted to make something out of this.

"I wonder who she is," said Jimmy.

"Her name's Dorothy Phillips," declared Lydia. "She's modern in the true sense of the word—in oil, you know, and very resourceful."

Jimmy wore a puzzled look.

"She isn't that bobbed-hair young woman I've seen you with, is she?"

"Precisely! She has such wonderful eyes, don't you think?"

Jimmy affected an inability to answer this vital question. Somehow Lydia felt pleased.

"She doesn't seem to be around much," he ventured.

Lydia glanced at the circle; then lowered her voice.

"I think she's having a little trouble. Oil is uncertain, you know. Don't repeat a word of this. I'm so glad I have bonds! Low interest, but sure—always sure, Mr. McGarvey. That's something, don't you think?"

Jimmy nodded owlishly. He had never seen a bond until the first Liberty Loan campaign.

"Here she is now!"

Dorothy Phillips came through the swinging glass doors into the ornate lobby. She smiled at Lydia. Then, suddenly, she saw Jimmy, and hesitated. The circle greeted her effusively.

"Oh, Dorothy!" said Lydia.

Jimmy arose to meet her. It seemed to him that she looked tired. There were faint lines about her blue-black, gorgeous eyes. A Diana home from the chase—tired, but, even so, a tired goddess.

"It's the funniest thing, Dorothy! We were just talking about you."

Dorothy made Lydia seem conspicuously mid-Victorian.

"Speaking of angels," replied Dorothy, smiling.

Her smile was warm. She had no gold tooth. Still, the Burnham Agency was professionally oblivious to warm smiles and perfect teeth.

They talked of divers things. There was, it seemed to Jimmy, something a little mysterious about her, as well as something a little sad; or, he concluded, it might be merely reserve.

Old Henneberry had touched the shoulders of the United States Congress to the mat. The circle was thinning out. Dorothy started to go. It was for this moment that the society detective had been waiting.

"I believe I know a friend of yours, Miss Phillips."

She looked at him with frank interest, but did not immediately answer.

"J. Clement Forsythe," said Jimmy.

She paled slightly. Fine points of light seemed to be dancing in her blue-black eyes; but her voice was even.

"You are mistaken, Mr. McGarvey. Mr. Forsythe is no friend of mine."

As she departed, tears were threatening, and she was bravely fighting them. Red and flustered, Jimmy left the hotel.

IV

MRS. J. CLEMENT FORSYTHE was apparently boiling. Her social secretary had called the agency twice before ten o'clock. The presence of Mr. McGarvey was in immediate demand.

"What's all the shooting for?" said Jimmy, scanning the telephone directory for the Forsythes' number.

The voice of Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe was metallic. Could Mr. McGarvey come to her home on West Twelfth Street? Yes, Mr. McGarvey could. Could Mr. McGarvey come at once? He could.

Adolph Link lumbered into Jimmy's retreat. He sat down heavily.

"Well?" inquired Jimmy.

Adolph fished out a memorandum.

"Forsythe has dinner alone at the Ritz last night. Then he goes to the Palace, after which he takes a cab and goes home. He doesn't meet nobody; he doesn't talk to nobody."

"Anything else?"

Professional pride was written plainly on the face of the shadow.

"You said it, Mac! This morning we make him at his home. He takes the Elevated to Rector Street, and visits the offices of Handy & Herpolsheimer."

"Who are Handy & Herpolsheimer?"

Adolph's tone was important.

"They're the biggest quick-touch lenders on the Street. I don't know the insides of this case, Mac"—Adolph's tone was complaining—"because you never let a fellow know any more than you have to; but I'd say, if you was expecting he'd be tryin' to raise money, we got him nailed to the mast."

"What else?"

"He blows the money sharks and goes over to the offices of the Newtex Oil Company. He disappears into the private office of this here Phillips woman again."

Jimmy slapped at an imaginary fly.

"What else?" he said impatiently.

"He's only there about three minutes. Then he goes to his office. Pete's roping him now."

Jimmy reached for his hat and stick.

"All right, Ad. Keep on his trail."

As he boarded the uptown train, Jimmy reflected that he had found most women to be good technical liars. Dorothy Phillips had said that Forsythe was not a friend, but he had called on her twice in two days.

Was she accessory to the theft of the paste copy of the pearl necklace? Jimmy's instinct told him that she didn't look like a thief. His experience told him to forget his instinct. Looks were no more than clothes, manicures, shampoos, shaves, shoes, and many other things.

At any rate it was a sorry mess—and all for a paste copy of a pearl necklace!

No hint of the dazzling richness of the Forsythe home was given by its plain exterior. That was New York all over, Jimmy thought. How much drama lay just behind some of these somber doors!

The butler let him in. He felt as if he was wading through foot-deep Persian rugs and imported carpets.

Somehow the look of triumph had gone out of Mrs. Forsythe's eye; but the impression she gave Jimmy was still that of a paper orchid.

"Mr. Mc—"

"McGarvey, madam."

"Mr. McGarvey, have you found the woman?"

"We think we are on her trail," Jimmy parried.

She was obviously a good hater. Hate was in her voice.

"Some trull of an actress, I suppose!" she said.

Jimmy did not reply.

"Isn't she?" asked Mrs. Forsythe.

"It wouldn't be fair to say who she is till we investigate further," replied Jimmy.

Clients were always impatient. They always regarded themselves—secretly or openly—as smarter than the detective. Clients were, to tell the truth, a nuisance—but necessary.

Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe lit a straw-tipped cigarette and gazed at Jimmy almost venomously.

"I understood that was the information I was paying for," she said.

"You shall have it when it is definite," he answered easily.

When sarcasm failed, Mrs. Forsythe failed. She had wrecked a couple of husbands with it, and a third was wobbling; but one couldn't expect much of a common detective.

"Oh, very well," she said. "It was another point that I wished to see you about, anyhow."

Jimmy nodded.

"I believe I told you that I exchanged my pearls, putting the genuine necklace in the case where I had kept the copy."

"Yes, madam."

"You understand, I assume, that it is extremely difficult to tell genuine pearls from a first-class copy. It is true that I transposed the pearls; but some one must have changed them back again."

"Which means—"

"My husband did obtain the genuine necklace," she snapped.

She was a little crestfallen, but more angry. Jimmy's thoughts ran quickly to Handy & Herpolsheimer. That visit was significant now.

Mrs. Forsythe was suddenly consumed with self-pity. Jimmy thought she was going to cry.

"It is true that we have had our differences," she wailed. "It is true that we have been unhappy; but I don't see why Clement should steal from me!"

As suddenly her lips formed a hard, uncompromising line.

"Damn him!" she added.

As Jimmy went down the steps, a pale

young man with dark, flowing hair brushed by him.

"You dear boy!" he heard Mrs. Forsythe say, as the door closed sharply.

V

J. CLEMENT FORSYTHE felt that he had reached the end of his rope. He smiled dourly.

There hadn't been much rope to begin with. His life had seemed to arrange itself in catastrophic reels. The one that was closing had begun with Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe—then Mrs. Hartley Barker. He had quoted Browning to her and won her; but he regarded himself as a peripatetic Nietzschean.

The fact that he didn't look the part had merely permitted him to be the more successful—or to experience more spectacular failures. A chin that sloped in was not usually associated with predatory instincts. He smiled again. The paradox of his appearance—six feet two of seeming blond innocuousness—had always been to his professional advantage.

The necklace had brought forty thousand dollars. It was rather cunning of the dear old catfish to change the two strings; but he knew pearls. Forty thousand dollars would tide him over in London until something turned up. Something always did turn up. He respected Barnum's theory about fools, but thought that the old showman's average was too low. The Olympic sailed at four o'clock.

If his flyer in oil had turned out as he expected, all this would have been unnecessary; but oil was devilishly uncertain.

He drew open another drawer. From it he took an army automatic that he had purchased from a needy ex-soldier. He looked at the safety catch, and shoved the gun into his coat pocket. He transferred some letters to an open bag.

Some one tapped on his door.

"Come in!" said J. Clement Forsythe. Jimmy McGarvey entered.

"Your office force being out on Saturday afternoon, I took the liberty of announcing myself," said Jimmy.

"What can I do for you to-day, Mr. McGarvey?"

The interruption was annoying, but J. Clement Forsythe's tone was cordial. He enjoyed acting. He would act in his coffin.

"About those oil leases, Mr. Forsythe," Jimmy began.

"Sorry, old man, but we disposed of them yesterday."

As a matter of fact, J. Clement had sold no oil leases. Honors were poetically even. Jimmy's face fell.

"I'm sorry, too," he said. "I had counted on those leases."

It occurred to J. Clement that it would be a technical error to let this young and fat pigeon get away unscathed.

"Tell you what," he said, his face beaming genially. "If you want to deposit ten thousand dollars with us, I believe I know where I can pick up leases even better than that Texas land which we discussed."

Jimmy shook his head dubiously.

"This bird is out to win the leather grapes!" he thought. "No—I was just over to the Newtex Company," he said aloud, and paused slightly. "They're getting ready to offer some new stuff."

J. Clement started involuntarily, almost imperceptibly. Then he tapped the glass top of his desk with a thick thumb. Jimmy managed a bovine, irritating calm.

"That so?" said J. Clement.

The society dick looked Mr. Forsythe squarely in the eye.

"I was talking to Miss Phillips over there," he said—"Miss Dorothy Phillips."

He paused exasperatingly. J. Clement's right hand dropped casually to his coat-pocket.

"McGarvey," he said, "you're not by any chance a detective, are you?"

Jimmy saw a vision of tears in liquid blue eyes.

"Yes," he answered. "How did you tumble to it?"

They saw each other with the quick, challenging look of prize fighters in a ring.

"Well, I'm damned!" said J. Clement.

"Well?" echoed Jimmy.

"I didn't think Miss Phillips would hire a detective. Rather shabby of her, I call it. I'm willing to admit I owe her company thirty thousand dollars. What about it? I'll pay her when I get it."

"But," said Jimmy, "supposing her company goes broke in the mean time?"

J. Clement's gesture was airy.

"Oil's a gamble. We all have to protect ourselves. It was up to her to protect herself."

Jimmy was consumed with contempt for the man.

"Mr. Forsythe, I admitted that I am a detective. You assumed that I am

employed by Miss Phillips. You are wrong."

"Who the devil are you employed by, then?"

"By Mrs. Forsythe."

To Jimmy's surprise, J. Clement began to laugh.

"The dear old—dear Julia!" he said.

"What is she wanting with a detective?"

"She wants to find her pearls," said Jimmy bluntly.

"I see!" He was beaming again. "She wishes me to help you find them."

"I think she thinks you might be able to help if you tried," said Jimmy.

J. Clement was taking it too easy. It suggested previous experience. The way people met detectives often spoke volumes. Jimmy cursed himself for not having looked up the man's past.

"Perhaps Mrs. Forsythe thinks I have the pearls," said J. Clement easily.

"Perhaps she does," replied Jimmy.

Forsythe tapped his desk thoughtfully. His bulging eyes were furtive.

"In that event," he continued, "it is quite hopeless—an impasse, isn't it? I should think Mrs. Forsythe would be the last one in the world to desire publicity. Pride, my boy! Pride is a great little life-saver for—let us assume—erring husbands; and a boon, no less, to the detective industry." His gesture was final. "On the other hand, being a detective without a warrant, you have no more power to act than a man in the street. Don't let me keep you!"

Jimmy flushed and made a blind stab.

"You're quite right," he said, "as regards your wife; but we've looked you up, Forsythe. Besides that there's the Newtex Company, and—"

He left off suddenly. He was staring into a level, glinting revolver.

"My boy," said J. Clement, "you can trust me implicitly. I won't shoot unless you move!"

He resumed packing—with one hand. There were points about him that Jimmy grudgingly admired. Still, he could not forgive him the revolver. It was inferior, inexcusable. Jimmy never carried such a thing.

Forsythe knocked an envelope from his desk with his elbow. It fell to the floor, half disclosing a passport. He picked it up and stowed it in his pocket. Then he rose and put on his hat. Bag in one hand

and revolver in the other, he stood looking at Jimmy.

"Private detective, eh? Well, this is a private office. Make yourself at home, Mr. McGarvey!"

He disappeared through the doorway, and Jimmy heard the click of a spring lock. Then the outer office door was locked. Indistinctly Jimmy heard the closing of elevator doors.

"Ain't I the lame brain?" he exclaimed, reaching for the telephone.

But it was three-quarters of an hour before representatives of the Burnham Agency persuaded the building superintendent to let him out.

VI

JIMMY ran up an echoing Wall Street. It being Saturday afternoon, the heart of the financial district was like a deserted ant hill. The echo of his hurrying footsteps seemed to repeat:

"Bonehead! Bonehead! Bonehead!"

He crossed Broadway, still on the run, and turned into Rector Street. Breathlessly he entered the reception offices of the Newtex Oil Company. No one met him. To the right there were small gold letters on a frosted window. "D. Phillips," they read.

The door was slightly ajar. Jimmy walked to it and looked in.

Her dark head was buried in her hands upon a great desk. Suddenly she looked up, and Jimmy saw two tears on her cheeks, like raindrops on a full-blown rose.

"I beg your pardon," he said, flushing guiltily.

She dabbed at her face with a tiny handkerchief and beckoned him in. She looked at him gravely.

"Miss Phillips," said Jimmy rapidly, "I have reason to believe that you are worrying over a certain matter, and that I can help you. It is important that we should act quickly. Will you do as I say?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"Please make out a receipt for the money owed you and come with me."

Dorothy held up an oblong, tear-stained paper.

"I have already made out the receipt. It was not called for."

"Then we must hurry," said the society detective.

His heart beat a little faster as he handed her into a taxi. He liked the feel of her

arm. He liked the angle of her firm little chin. She trusted him.

The transatlantic liner was ready to leave its pier as they descended from their taxi. Everywhere there was color, from the red ensign dancing aloft to the scarlet caps of the bustling baggage smashers. A small city was getting about to go to sea.

"Follow me," said Jimmy. "May I take the receipt?"

She handed it to him. He placed it in his inside coat pocket. The Burnham Agency protected the line. There was a whispered word with the men on guard, and Jimmy and Miss Phillips went up the gangway.

"Wait here," Jimmy said, as they reached the salon.

He rather imagined that J. Clement Forsythe would keep to his stateroom. It was a correct surmise. Jimmy rapped at the door. A gruff voice came from within. The society detective flung the door open wide.

Forsythe was stooping over his bag.

"I'm blowed!" he said, straightening. "How'd you know I was here?"

Jimmy's right hand was doubled in his coat pocket.

"I'd advise you not to pull that gat again, Mr. Forsythe." He looked at J. Clement squarely. "Otherwise you can trust me implicitly," he added mirthlessly.

"I see!" replied J. Clement. "Just what can I do for you, Mr. McGarvey?"

"There's nothing in particular that you can do for me, Mr. Forsythe; but there's a young lady here—Miss Phillips. Do you think you ought to go to London without seeing her?"

He frowned.

"I haven't anything to say to Miss Phillips," he said surlily.

With his left hand Jimmy reached into the inside pocket of his coat, and exposed a small part of the tear-stained receipts.

"Awhile ago you said something about a warrant being necessary for your arrest," he said coldly. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to use this."

J. Clement fingered his blond mustache thoughtfully. Conscience is what ails peripatetic Nietzscheans.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "I'll pay her!"

"Just step this way with me," said Jimmy briskly.

They met Dorothy in the salon. She rose quickly, her eyes serious.

"Mr. Forsythe asked me to bring you to the boat so that he could settle his account with you, Miss Phillips," said Jimmy.

The husband of Mrs. Forsythe bowed—and counted off thirty one-thousand-dollar bills.

"I am sorry to have inconvenienced you, Miss Phillips," he said, handing her the currency.

"Without this, as I explained, we should have lost the Royston lease. It would have meant ruin," she said simply.

"Miss Phillips, will you be good enough to give this to Mr. Forsythe?" said Jimmy, extracting the receipt from his inside pocket.

She handed him the paper, and then edged toward the door. J. Clement opened it slowly. For a moment his eyes grew hard. Then he smiled.

"Very well, McGarvey!" he said. "It's all in a lifetime!"

"That's how I see it exactly. I'm glad you look at it in the same way," replied Jimmy.

"But," said J. Clement, "of course, you're morally wrong."

"I wouldn't wonder," said Jimmy. "Say, Forsythe, have you the ticket for that necklace?"

VII

JIMMY went to the vault with Dorothy. New York was at its springtime loveliest. As they walked up the avenue, a brilliant sun played grotesque tricks with their shadows. She held his arm lightly.

"It's singular," she said, "that I never heard Mr. Forsythe speak of you. Have you been friends long?"

"Not so very long," he answered. "Say, how would you like to take a bus and go out to Arrowhead for dinner?"

"I'd love it!"

"I get tired of looking at that hotel and the old ladies' sewing circle," he ventured. She smiled.

"Careful! Remember I'm in that circle," she said.

"But you don't seem to belong to it," he protested.

Spring was blossoming at Arrowhead, too. The jazzbo boys with the muted reeds sent music scurrying on frenzied wings. The calm bosom of the Hudson was powdered with early star dust. Here and there eerie lights stung the Jersey hills.

Dorothy was a wonderful dancer — of that Jimmy was sure. The music stopped, and he applauded briskly. The perspiring leader grinned his appreciation, but shook a curly head. Jimmy held Dorothy's chair, then sat down to a bootlegger's high ball.

Suddenly he was staring straight into the eyes of Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe. She occupied a near-by table. Her companion was a pale young man with dark, flowing hair. She bowed slightly, and Jimmy smiled.

In Mrs. J. Clement Forsythe's mind blazing curiosity was waging a tumultuous conflict with acquired snobbishness. Ought she to converse in public with a detective? Yes, she ought.

She met Jimmy in the long corridor, now torrential with a segment of metropolitan night life.

"I suppose that's the woman you're with — the young trollop!" she said in guarded excitement.

"No, madam," Jimmy replied. "There is no woman."

Her face fell.

"Where is my husband?" she asked sharply. "Have you found the pearls?" Jimmy decided to speak bluntly.

"Your husband sold the pearls and is on his way to London," he said.

She flushed angrily.

"The unspeakable thief!" she exclaimed. Then she turned on Jimmy caustically. "I must congratulate you, young man, on the way you handled this!"

"Of course, madam, we could have him arrested. It is still possible," he suggested.

"Not for worlds!" she said quickly. She gazed through the colonial glass doors at her pale, dark companion. "London! Why, that's desertion!" she added.

"No doubt of it, madam."

She smirked and patted her hair. Jimmy felt in his vest and handed her a yellow ticket. Then he went back to Dorothy.

THE STREAM'S SECRET

WHAT is thy secret, stream,
That all day long
I lie here in a dream,
Lost in thy song?
Reiteration of sweet birds
And lords of rime
Weary with time,
And weary grow the wisest words;
But thou, oh, thou strange water,
The mist-hung mountain's witchcraft daughter,
Gliding and leaping
Thy silver way,
Where trout lie sleeping
And sunbeams play,
'Neath leafy ceiling
Of woodlands stealing,
Through the green bushes
Of feathered rushes
And sworded sedges,
Over mossed ledges
Of glen and grot
Joyously flinging—
Only thy singing
O'er boulder and fall,
Thy wordless madrigal,
Wearieth me not;
For, saying nothing, it saith all.

Bruce Barber

A Pilgrimage of Adventure*

A REALISTIC STORY OF PRESENT-DAY AMERICAN LIFE

By Sam Hellman

HENRY TRENT, instructor in logic at Walsingham University, is threatened with a breakdown from overwork, and his uncle, chancellor of the university, advises him to go out into the world, to live in the fresh air, and to give his brain a rest. Striking off at a venture, Trent finds himself in Hopetown, where he gets employment as a laborer on a new building being erected for the Acme Works. He makes a friend of Buck Staley, assistant foreman on the Acme job, and takes a room at the house where Staley boards.

The rich man of Hopetown is young Arnim Hope, a drunkard and libertine. Meeting Trent and Staley, it is Hope's whim to invite them into his house, where they sample his private stock and he shows them his photographs of women. Among these Trent notices one of a girl whose fine face makes her seem utterly out of place in such a collection, and he purloins it. Later he identifies it as a photograph of Janet Preston, whose father, a contractor, is putting up the new Acme building.

Preston, it develops, is in straits for ready money, and Hope, who has some private grudge against him, has used his influence to prevent the Hopetown banks from granting the contractor a loan. Trent goes before the directors of the First National, wins over Ahearn, a leading member of the board, and persuades them to advance Preston ten thousand dollars. Hope reaches the bank just too late to intervene.

IX

HOPE growled his way from the bank, but he did not call upon Ahearn.

Between himself and the thick-necked manufacturer yawned a chasm of ill feeling, carved by a drunken escapade of Arnim's, which the young man had no desire to cross. Instead, he went to the office of his man of business.

"Heflin, what have you done about the Preston matter?"

"Nothing at all. You will recall that you instructed me to hold it up."

"I thought you told me Preston couldn't get any more help at the banks."

"So he assured me."

"He lied!" snapped Hope. "He got ten thousand dollars at the First National this morning."

"At the First National? Are you sure? I know of my own knowledge that they turned him down less than a week ago."

"Well, he got it. Ten thousand won't see him through, will it?"

"Hardly. However, it will enable him to drag along until you come to a decision. I suppose he told the bank that he expected help from you, and—"

"From me?"

"Why, yes. You haven't forgotten the talk we had about helping Preston?"

Hope laughed harshly.

"Help him! I want to smash him, break him in two—do you understand?"

"No, I don't," returned Heflin. "What has he done to you?"

"That's none of your cursed business. I want every possible obstacle put in his way. I want you to see to it that he doesn't borrow another cent in this town. Get hold of Gamble at the First National—he'll be back in a couple of days—and have him close down tight!"

"Just a moment, Mr. Hope. Aren't you cutting off your nose to spite your face? Don't you want that Acme job finished?"

"I don't give one hoot whether it is or not. I want the Preston job finished, though. Put the screws to him. Will you do as I say?"

"Very well," returned Heflin.

"Who's the boss at the Acme job?"

"A man by the name of Eagan is superintending the work."

"Preston there?"

"Very seldom. You can find him at your office building, I imagine."

* Copyright, 1922, by Sam Hellman—This story began in the March number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

"I don't want him. Remember, now, what I want done."

Hope drove quickly to the new addition. A workman summoned Eagan.

"Trent? Oh, yes, he's the lad piling lumber over there. Want to see him?"

"Not right now. Who is he?"

"Don't know much about him, Mr. Hope. He's stranger—drifted in a couple of weeks ago and asked for a job. That's about all I can tell you."

"Send him over, will you?"

Eagan departed on his errand. Arnim recognized the slender figure stooping over the pile of planking.

"Young Hope wants to see you," said the foreman to the perspiring youth. "Hustle over!"

"Couldn't think of it," smiled Trent.

"I'm away back on my work as it is."

"Forget it!" hissed Eagan. "Know who he is?"

"Town drunkard, isn't he?"

Picking up a plank, Trent started into the building. When he emerged from the skeleton an angry figure awaited him at the lumber stack.

"Why didn't you come when I called you?" snarled Hope. "You bum, you!"

Trent stared, and his arms dropped in simulated surprise.

"Well, well!" he said heartily. "Why, you're sober, aren't you? I trust that the private stock is not exhausted."

Arnim's eyes flared viciously.

"I want that picture back," he said.

"Picture?"

"The one you took from my house, you thief!"

"I beg your pardon," bowed Trent. "I thought you were sober. You aren't, are you?"

"Do I get the picture," shouted Hope, "or—"

He choked with rage.

"Or," returned the other.

"I'll have you put in jail, you damned crook!"

With a threatening wave of his hand, he moved away.

"Oh, Mr. Hope!" called Trent.

Arnim turned.

"You speak of having me arrested," said the young professor in his suavest Walsingham manner. "Tell me, what are the accommodations provided? How does the Hopetown bastille compare with the penal facilities of other cities? Do they have

running water? I forget that the mention of water is offensive to you. Do—"

"Bring that picture here to-morrow," gritted Arnim, "or you'll go to jail!"

X

THAT evening Trent walked home with Staley. Despite the fullness of his day, he felt less fatigued than at any time since his departure from Valley Falls. It was pleasantly cool. The talk was mostly about the work on the building.

"Oh, by the way," remarked Trent, after half the distance had been covered, "your friend Hope called on me to-day. Did you hear about it?"

"He's no friend of mine," growled Buck.

"What did he want?"

"He wants that photograph returned."

"He does, eh? What did you tell him?"

"Just what you think I ought to have told him, Buck. He says he'll have me arrested. Pure bluff, I imagine."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," returned Staley soberly. "He's crazy enough to do anything, and he's strong enough with the police and courts to have you framed and put away on a burglary charge. Besides, you know you'd have a tough time explaining what you were doing in the house. The truth sounds fishy. Watch out, my boy! You don't know what a grip that souse has in this burg. He's pulled enough rough stuff to send ten men to the penitentiary for life, and he hasn't even been arrested for speeding."

A sudden thought obtruded itself gravely upon Trent, and for the rest of the walk conversation languished. After dinner he went to his room and attired himself with unusual care. From a drawer of the chiffonier he took a photograph, which he placed in his overcoat pocket. In the hallway he thumbed the telephone book; then he set out for Capitol Hill.

Preston himself opened the door. There was a new light in his eyes, and his shoulders were straight.

"Come in," he invited. "There's nothing wrong, is there?" he asked anxiously.

"Not a thing," returned Trent. "The bank took care of you all right?"

"They did, thank you."

"Let's forget all about it, Mr. Preston. May I see your daughter?"

"Janet?"

"I believe that's her name. Is she at home?"

"Yes. My God!" he added suddenly, "you're not going to tell her, are you?"

The young man regarded him reproachfully. Preston was reassured.

"Sit down. I'll get her for you. She's upstairs, reading."

The girl came. Before her smiling, frank eyes Trent again felt that same mental confusion, that same toppling of poise, that same disturbance of philosophic calm that he had noted in the morning. In a simple house blouse and skirt, her hair somewhat awry, she affected him more strongly than she had in the careful attire of their first meeting. He was seeing her progressively, as it were—first in a photograph, again wrapped in furs, and now in thin garments that showed the slender, boyish lines of her figure and the suggestions of a curved and shapely womanhood.

"You wished to see me," she said gently. "I am glad you called. Father has been speaking of you."

"If Mr. Preston will excuse us—" began Trent.

Surprise came into Janet's eyes.

"I don't—"

At this critical moment Preston came to the rescue.

"You young folks will have to pardon me," he said. "I've got some estimates to look at."

The girl seated herself and regarded her caller gravely. Her eyes and lips seemed to be struggling between amusement and displeasure.

"Perhaps," observed Trent, after a rather awkward silence, "I had better introduce myself. Our meeting this morning was—sketchy, to say the least. I am Henry Trent, and am employed by your father at the Acme addition."

"You formerly taught school, didn't you?"

She was making it easier for him. Complete coordination between brain and tongue were reestablished.

"Yes," he replied. "I will go straight to the purpose of my call. Last night one of the other workmen and myself were invited into the Hope house."

"Arnim Hope's?"

Trent nodded.

"Well?" asked the girl.

He noted that the hands resting in her lap had clinched. Without further preliminaries he plunged into his story—how he and Staley had encountered the young

millionaire, how they had been persuaded to accompany him, the host's drunken hospitality, and—

"In the group of photographs was one of you. It stood out like a beautiful white flower in a black swamp, like a patch of blue in a stormy sky, like an angel in hell. I beg your pardon. You understand, Miss Preston, I am merely describing the picture as it affected me. I have no intention of being personal."

"I understand," she said dully.

The color had ebbed from her cheeks.

"I took the picture from the wall—"

The girl half rose.

"You did what?"

"I removed the photograph and left the house."

"But why? You don't know me."

"I never saw you before this morning," returned Trent. "I took the picture," he explained simply, "because it did not belong there."

"What did Arnim—Mr. Hope—say?"

"He expostulated, but he was too drunk to make any effective objection. You will remember that Staley was with me."

"And the photograph?"

The girl's tone was decidedly cold.

"I have it," said Trent. "I took it in a moment of uncontrolled impulse. You would have known nothing of it, but for something that came up this afternoon. Hope has threatened to have me arrested."

The color flamed back into Miss Preston's cheeks.

"Well, you ought to be!" she cried angrily. "What business have you taking pictures that don't belong to you? I don't thank you a bit for your interference. Who are you to pass judgment on my—"

"I'm sorry," interrupted Trent. "I see now that I have blundered, and I am willing to make such reparation as you suggest. Let me make one point clear, though—I am not alarmed by Hope's threat of arrest. It's the possibility that there may be annoying publicity for you, the bandying about of your name and features, that I am concerned about. I have the picture with me. Shall I return it? Here it is."

Janet took the photograph and gazed at it intently. Suddenly it dropped to her lap and tears came into the soft eyes.

Trent sat helpless. He rose once, in an effort to distract her attention; but she did not look up, and he returned to his seat.

"I'm sorry," he repeated futilely.

The girl recovered herself.

"I really don't blame you so much, Mr. Trent, but you have placed me in a difficult position." Her voice hardened. "Take the picture back to him. Tell him that I told you to return it. Be sure and tell him that."

"Very well, I shall do so at once."

He placed the photograph in his overcoat pocket. The affair seemed to be terminated. The girl rose, and Trent followed her to the door.

"Hereafter," she said, "might I suggest that you should control your impulses to act as a knight-errant in private picture galleries? Mr. Hope is a friend of mine."

"I cannot believe it, Miss Preston," was the smiling retort; "but your wishes shall be carried out."

A curious feeling of relief came over Trent as he stepped into the street. The daughter of the contractor was singularly disturbing. She jarred the orderliness of his mind, distorted his vision, and even disturbed his methodical heartbeats. His hand fell on the photograph.

"Might as well have it over with," he said, half aloud, "thus completing an imperfect day!"

A fifteen-minute walk brought him to the big house on the hill.

"I have a message for Mr. Hope," he told the servant at the door. "Tell him that I want only a few seconds of his time."

Trent waited in the library. Hope came in, his face flushed with liquor, his lips twisted in a sneering smile. However, he was not drunk. His eyes showed that.

"Thought it over, have you?"

"I am here to return the photograph," said Trent. "It is Miss Preston's wish that I should bring it back to you. I must also beg pardon for having violated your hospitality."

"Janet told you to bring it here?"

"Yes."

"So you went to her, did you?"

"Let me make myself clear," was Trent's reply. "Your threat of arrest did not worry me in the least, but inasmuch as the young lady might have become involved in any harebrained action of yours, I felt that her wishes should be ascertained. I therefore called on her, and she asked me to return the picture—that is all. Here it is. Good night!"

"Now, just a minute," said Hope. "I want to talk to you."

"I'd rather not. The matter is closed. May I ask, however, that you will place the photograph among more seemly surroundings? I—"

"All right, all right!" cut in Hope impatiently. "I want to talk to you about something different altogether. Sit down, won't you? Take off your coat. Have a drink?"

Trent sank into the armchair. A great weariness assailed him. His legs trembled, his eyes half closed.

"Tired?" asked Hope sympathetically. "You ought to take a bracer."

Trent shook his head.

"What is it you wish?" he inquired.

Arnim pushed his chair close to the visitor's and fixed protruding eyes upon him.

"What's the game, Trent?" he snapped suddenly.

"The game? What do you mean?"

"What's the idea of passing for a laborer and swinging loans at the First National for Preston? I heard all about it. What are you to Preston?"

"I don't know that it is any of your business," returned Trent slowly; "but perhaps, as I owe you amends in the matter of the picture, I ought to answer your question. Our relations are those of employer and employed—that's all. He was in trouble, and I went to his assistance. Anything strange in that?"

"How long have you known Preston and his daughter?"

"Since this morning."

"Oh, bunk! You mean to tell me that you would borrow ten thousand dollars for a perfect stranger and steal pictures for another one? Don't get sore. I have an interest in the matter of the loan. You know I own the Acme factory, don't you?"

"So I've heard, but—"

"You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, listen." Arnim's tone was truculent. "You want to get in right here, don't you? I guess you've heard how I stand here. I can make you, or run you out of the place. From what they tell me down at the bank, you're there with the head stuff. Want to go to work for me?"

"It's very good of you, but I am quite content where I am."

"The job I'm talking about," persisted Hope, "means big money. You're not satisfied with three or four dollars a day, are you?"

"For the present, yes. I'd better be going. Got a hard day on the lumber pile ahead of me."

Arnim's eyes gleamed angrily.

"Listen here, you! If you won't work for me, by God, you sha'n't work against me! When you went to the bank for Preston, you butted into my affairs. When you stole that picture, you did it again."

"I admit the picture charge," conceded Trent; "but just how did my helping Preston trespass on your peace of mind? He's working on your job, isn't he?"

"I'll tell you," cried Hope excitedly, jumping to his feet and waving a clinched fist. "I want Preston to fail on that job. I want to smash him to hell, and I don't care who knows it. The ten thousand that you got for him won't help him much, and if you try to help him again I'll put you where you can't do any harm. You'd better keep your nose out of my affairs, I tell you! And stay away from the girl. She's mine!"

"Do you know," said Trent musingly, "that every time you permit your anger to rise your blood pressure increases, manifested eventually by arteriosclerosis—hardening of the arteries? This malady, taken in connection with one hundred barrels of whisky—you have that much, haven't you?—is certain to—"

"You heard what I said, didn't you?"

"You know," went on Trent, "the other night I went to a movie. There was a villain in it who was trying to ruin the father of the girl who had rejected him. You must have written the scenario."

Hope's rage rendered him helpless.

"Good night!" smiled Trent. "Keep an eye on your blood pressure!"

The walk home sapped the last of his strength. Laboriously he climbed the stairs to his room. A moment later a heavy thudding sound caught the ears of Staley, in the next room. He found Trent prostrate on the floor, unconscious.

"Poor kid!" muttered Buck. "Heaving timber is too much for him!"

After five minutes the young man returned to life.

"Time to get up?" he asked faintly.

"Time to go to bed," growled Staley, "and to stay there a couple of days. You passed out, Slim—didn't you know?"

"Passed out? Ah, yes, now that you speak of it, I believe I did. Expect I worked too hard to-day."

"You ought to get an easier job," returned Staley. "Anyhow, stay in bed to-morrow. I'll square things with Eagan."

"All right, doctor! I'm pretty tired. Busy day, busy—"

The assistant foreman shut the door behind him carefully.

XI

THE day was far advanced when Trent awoke the next morning. His head ached dully, and his limbs protested against movement. Painfully he walked to the chiffonier, where his watch lay. It was after nine o'clock. Dizziness assailed him, and he tottered back to bed. There came a knock on the door.

"Come in," he invited weakly.

A girl entered carrying a tray—a slender, pale girl, with deep, melancholy eyes and a heap of black hair that accentuated the whiteness of her skin. With a little more color and animation she would have been beautiful.

"That's very kind of you, Miss Pritchard," smiled Trent; "but I am not in the least hungry."

"But you must eat. George—Mr. Staley—told me that I must insist."

"Well, Buck's the doctor. I'll try."

He followed the active fingers as they brought a chair to the side of the bed, placed upon it the tray containing toast, coffee, and eggs, and handed him a folded napkin.

Trent had long since marked Miss Pritchard from the other lodgers at Mrs. Murphy's. The brooding sadness of her eyes, the quiet voice seldom heard amid the table chatter, had drawn his attention. His interest had also been aroused by Staley's attitude toward the girl. The youth's gaze constantly wandered to the little figure at the right of him in hungry worship, and her few smiles were for him.

Once Trent had gone with Staley and the girl to a neighborhood picture show. It had been a quiet evening, with little conversation.

"Fine little woman, that!" he had remarked that night, after Miss Pritchard had gone to her room.

Buck had turned narrowed eyes on his friend.

"The best in the world!" he had replied in a tone that carried both an announcement and a warning.

Trent had smiled his understanding.

Breakfast arrangements completed, the girl prepared to depart.

"Won't you stay?" begged the young professor. "If you leave," he threatened, "I won't eat a morsel!"

"I really should go to work," she replied; "but I'll stay for a few minutes, if you promise to lick the platter clean."

She seated herself at the end of the bed, and they talked of general matters. Trent, who had never exactly understood the nature of Miss Pritchard's employment, now learned that she worked at a woman's exchange, doing a variety of fancy work, from the painting of china to the fashioning of sewing baskets and the like. Under his kindly and intelligent comment, the girl spoke with unusual freedom.

The conversation turned to Buck.

"Mr. Staley is very fond of you," she remarked.

Trent replaced the empty coffee cup and laughed.

"I am surprised that he has any fondness left!"

The girl looked at him inquiringly.

"I had thought," he explained, "that his entire supply of fondness had been dedicated to you."

A tinge of color rose in her pale cheeks, and the lashes dropped over her somber eyes. Trent launched into a eulogy of Staley's fine qualities, to which the girl listened with bowed head. When she glanced up, he saw tears.

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "Have I said something that I should not have? I'm a blundering idiot!"

"You are very good," returned Miss Pritchard. "You have done nothing wrong. I—I must really go to work now."

Trent pointed to the ravaged tray.

"For a man without an appetite I have done pretty well, don't you think?"

Miss Pritchard met his laugh with a smile, and departed.

With eyes closed, Trent lay back and pondered on the mysteries of womankind. Here was a puzzle that all of his reading in the philosophy of the ages had left him unprepared to solve. Apparently the only thing that could be dogmatically expected of the other sex was the unexpected—the tears of Miss Pritchard, for example, when the situation called for smiles and blushes; the anger of Miss Preston, when everything indicated gratitude, or at least an appreciation of good intentions.

His mind dwelt at length on Janet Preston. It was inconceivable that a girl of her type would permit a drunkard and roué to hang her photograph amid a galaxy of light-o'-loves, to be caressed by liquor-inflamed eyes.

A girl of her type? Ah, that was the trick in the puzzle! There were no types in womankind. Each female was a genus, a species, an entity of herself.

It was not so with men. They could readily be segregated into distinct groups. The actions of one of the group was the action of the group. What you learned about one applied with almost unfailing accuracy to the others in the same class. A complete study of women, Trent decided, would entail a study of each individual of the sex, and even then the research would be of little value to posterity, inasmuch as succeeding generations would furnish no precise duplicates.

Then, too, there was something about women which, like the quills of the porcupine or the thorns of the rose, prevented close inspection. Something that was toxic emanated from them—a subtle drug that caused the brain of the investigator to grow numb, that disarranged his mental card index and substituted incoherent imaginings for sober reasoning. Yet it was a study of compelling interest, Trent felt—one to be pursued in the face of all discouragements.

At noon Miss Pritchard returned.

"Feeling better?" she asked.

"Much," he replied cheerfully. "I think I'll dress and go to work."

"You won't do any such damned thing!" growled a voice, and Staley swung open the door. "How's the patient, Grace?"

"Doing nicely," she replied. "You can nurse him now while I go to lunch."

"Hungry?" asked Staley.

"As a wolf. There's no use of my loafing here any longer. I feel completely rested."

"Might as well make a day of it. Preston was down looking for you this morning."

"Preston? What did he want?"

"Wants to take you away from the building, Eagan said. Has a better job for you, I guess."

"I'm satisfied where I am, Buck. I'm getting so I know every piece of lumber in the building by its first name."

"Uhuh," returned the other absently.

A spell of silence ensued. Buck, moving restlessly in the chair, appeared worried. Suddenly he faced the man in bed.

"What do you think of her?" he blurted.

"Her—Miss Pritchard? About the same as you do. Don't get alarmed, Buck. She's a fine girl in every way. A trifle inclined to be melancholy, I thought. A bit of vivacity would make her perfect."

"She is now," retorted Staley. "Know why I sent her to look after you?"

"Because you thought I needed attention, I suppose."

"Partly, but I wanted you to size her up for me. You're smart. I thought by talking to her alone you might find out what is worrying her. I'm too thick-headed to find out for myself."

"I hardly know how to answer you, Buck. From her paleness, I thought perhaps she had been ill. Naturally our conversation was not of such a character that I could—"

Staley interrupted with a movement of impatience.

"Can't you help me, Slim? You've got brains. I'm all up in the air."

"Go ahead," said Trent gently. "Tell me, Buck."

"I can't make her out. I've been going with Grace for three months. You know I'm crazy about her. I don't have to tell you that, and—"

"And she about you," cut in Trent. "You don't have to tell me that, either. I know!"

"Why won't she marry me, then?" demanded Staley.

"I'm hardly prepared to answer that question. Of course, I'm not in the girl's confidence."

"She loves me," the other went on miserably. "I'm sure of that, but every time I talk of getting married she bursts out crying. Tell me why."

"Doesn't she offer any explanation?"

"Not a word," was the gloomy reply. "I want her, Slim—I want her!" he went on fiercely. "Can't you help me?"

"My dear boy," returned Trent, "I can't intrude upon a lady's private affairs. As the man she loves, it would seem to me that you are the one person entitled to pry into her mind. Anything I might do would very properly be considered an insolent and intolerable interference. Don't you see, Buck?"

"I guess you're right," muttered Staley; "but she won't tell me anything. I thought"—he hesitated—"you might find out in some roundabout way. There's something about you, Slim, that makes people want to tell you everything they know. Even Eagan and the big Swede have noticed it. You look so sure of yourself, so—Eagan calls it efficient. Oh, well, why should I bother you with my troubles?"

"Don't talk like that, Buck. You know that if there is anything I can do to help you, I will gladly do it. I owe you something," Trent finished with a grin, "for bumping you with that two by four!"

Staley rose wrathfully.

"Keep your damned jokes to yourself!"

"Sit down, Buck. I'm going to help you right now. The jest you object to is merely an introduction to the prescription. To begin with, I want to assure you that the troubles which now appear so overwhelming will vanish, and you and Grace will be happy."

"How do you know?"

"I'm not a fortune teller," went on Trent; "but troubles almost always fade away and disappear, unless they are kept alive by gloom and pessimism. Cultivate a sense of humor, Buck. Develop poise. Don't run when no man pursueth. Here you are, for example, downcast by the thought that Miss Pritchard will not marry you—just as downcast as you could be if you had finally and irrevocably lost her. The girl is probably distressed by something that a proper adjustment of mental focus would reduce from the ponderous to the trivial. Laugh at your woes, Buck, and they themselves will become infected with the sense of humor and burst out laughing."

"I don't get you," muttered Staley blankly.

"Let's look at the matter from another angle. Miss Pritchard is unhappy. You don't know the cause, and it's of no importance—I mean in the present discussion. Obviously her melancholy is increased by the prospect of marriage. In other words, you, who love her deeply, contribute to her depression. That's the truth, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. She cries—"

"Precisely. If you go into a room that is dimly lit, and put the lights out altogether, you will find difficulty in getting

out. Miss Pritchard is wandering about in the gloom of her own mind. You come along and add to the darkness. Worry means a problem to be solved. How do you expect her to solve, at midnight, a problem that baffles her at twilight? How do you expect her to find her way out of a murky room, if you pull down the shades and exclude what little light there is?"

"You think I make her sadder?"

"Yes—by asking her to marry you. That's obvious, isn't it?"

"She cries," muttered Staley. "What can I do?"

"Cultivate a cheerful attitude. Help to lighten the gloom of her mind. Keep her cheerful. Don't importune her to marry you until she herself walks out of the light and into your arms."

"How will I know when that is?"

"You will know. You will be able to read it in her eyes, on her lips, in her general demeanor. I don't know much about women, Buck, but what I am telling you seems elementary. Make a pleasant workshop of her mind. Don't be a handicap. Lend a hand. You know what I mean."

"I think I do. You think if she is made happy her troubles will disappear, and then she'll be willing—"

"To marry you, Buck. Yes, I know she will. Some day you'll both laugh heartily at what now seems to be the blackest of tragedies. Remember, now, no more talk of marriage! Act as if you know what's worrying her, or, better, as if you didn't think she had a trouble in the world. Get the point?"

"I'll try. You kind of keep an eye on us, will you?"

"All right!" laughed Trent. "I'll be the lightning inspector!"

XII

"How about a better job?" asked Preston. "You've had enough of this one, haven't you?"

Trent dropped a plank and looked up.

"I'm perfectly satisfied here."

"Well, I'm not," grunted the builder. "There's no sense in wasting you at this kind of work. I've got something that I think you can handle in good shape."

"No inside work!"

"No—this job is mostly outside. I kind of hate to put you on it, after what you did for me at the bank; but you're the only man I know that could do any good."

"What is it, Mr. Preston?"

"The material men—they're holding back on me, giving me all kinds of foolish excuses for not delivering stuff that I've got to have. Looks like they're framing on me."

"Hope's work, eh?"

Preston's heavy lower lip dropped.

"What do you know about me and Hope?"

"I know he wants to ruin you."

"Where did you hear that?"

"Hope told me himself, at his house, a couple of nights ago. He told me he didn't care who knew it."

"At his house? Are you a friend of his?" Preston asked suspiciously.

"Hardly," smiled Trent. "I wasn't there on a social errand. There was a little private matter between him and me."

"Know him long?"

"Much too long, though I never saw him before last Tuesday. What's the matter, Mr. Preston? What's the trouble between you and that drunkard, if it's a proper question?"

"It's proper enough," returned the builder, "but I don't know the answer. I found out yesterday for the first time that he is after me. I'll tell you what happened. The Lord knows I can trust you. A couple of weeks ago I went to Heflin—he's the manager of the Hope estate—for a little lift in carrying out this contract. Heflin's not a bad fellow, and he thought he could fix things up all right with Hope. He gave me a lot of encouragement; but yesterday he told me he could give me no help. He whispered something to me about looking out for Hope—that he had it in for me."

"For me?" I said. "What for?"

"I don't know," he replied; "but maybe your daughter might be able to tell you."

"Janet?" I said, surprised.

"Ask her," said Heflin, and that's all I could get out of him.

"Last night I spoke to her about it. She doesn't know any reason why Hope should have an ax out for me. My God!" cried Preston with sudden fierceness. "If that rat—"

"I shouldn't worry about that," interposed Trent. "You have my assurance that he has offered no indignity to your daughter. The present situation makes that plain. It is possible that she has angered Hope by refusing his attentions. She knows him, doesn't she?"

"Oh, yes—they went to school together when they were kids. She has no use for him, though. No decent girl has."

"I can readily understand that," agreed Trent. "Tell me about my new job."

"Here"—Preston took a well-thumbed memorandum book from his inside pocket—"is a list of concerns in Hopetown and Jasper who are holding back on me. I know they're not busy—there's little building going on—but they won't send my stuff. What they do bring is defective and out of measurement. There's a hundred-dollar-a-day penalty on this job, and I'm overdue now."

"I see!"

"I thought," went on the contractor, tearing a page from the book, "that if you had a little talk with them, like you had with the folks down at the First National, you might kind of throw a scare into them and make 'em speed up."

"I'll try."

"By the way," remarked Preston, as he followed Trent to the tool house for his change of clothing, "Janet told me to ask you to call, if I saw you."

"She did? When did she say that?"

"At breakfast this morning."

"Mr. Preston, do you know why you are not a rich man to-day?" Trent suddenly asked.

"Why?"

"Because," was the deliberate reply, "you devote too much time to trivial matters and overlook the big, shiny, outstanding facts of life."

"I don't—"

"It's all right. I'll get your stuff moving in the morning."

Trent was still whistling when he boarded the street car bound for the plant of the Gardner Sash and Door Company, which sprawled over several acres in the outskirts of the city. During the ride he worked out a plan of campaign. It centered about a tramp, a brakeman, and Buck Staley—the pitting of assurance against suspicion.

There was little difficulty getting access to Oscar Gardner. The head of the sash and door company was a partially bald, wholly worried-looking individual, with the yellowed eyes of a bilious patient and a mustache that was apparently maintained for the purpose of providing exercise for nervous fingers.

"Trent's my name," began the visitor

pleasantly. "Rather pleasant weather, don't you think? Business good?"

"Could be better," grunted the other. "What can I do for you?"

The question was ignored.

"Peculiar case, that of the Hodges Coal Company in the paper the other day, wasn't it?"

"Huh! Didn't read it."

"You should have," chided Trent. "Very, very interesting. You see, the Hodges company entered into a conspiracy with the Owens Foundry Corporation to delay shipments to a rival steel concern. The result of the delay was that several tons of material were ruined."

"Say, listen!" cut in Gardner. "What the devil do I care about all this?"

"The court," went on Trent, unperturbed, "fined the coal firm twenty thousand dollars and sent old Eli Hodges to the penitentiary. Rather harsh, the law as to trade conspiracy! As a business man, I'll wager you think that Hodges got off light—only three years, you know. Ever read Section 6753 of the revised code, Mr. Gardner?"

"What are you—a lawyer?"

Instead of answering, Trent asked another question.

"Have you ever been to the circuit attorney's office in the grand jury room?"

A strained look came into the bilious eyes.

"What?" stammered Gardner. "What are you getting at?"

"Let's drop that phase of the conversation," went on Trent. "I observe a number of wagons and teams outside that appear to be idle. Don't you think it would be neighborly to pile them up with sashes and doors and drop the lot off at the new Acme addition during the afternoon?"

The smiling eyes hung upon Gardner, unwavering.

"I'm busy," muttered the lumber dealer, "but—well—"

"I would suggest that the entire order given you by Mr. Preston should be delivered by sunset."

"All right—I'll do the best I can."

"Nothing could be fairer," congratulated Trent. "Shall I send you a clipping of the Hodges case?"

"No!" barked Gardner. "Preston will get his stuff."

"To-day?"

"Yes. Satisfied?"

"Quite. Remember me to Arnim Hope the next time you see him, will you? Charming fellow, is he not?"

"Charming, hell!" grunted the other. "Trying to get himself and everybody else into trouble!"

"Into trouble?" politely queried Trent. "Oh, yes—with that private stock of his. Well, it's a long private stock that has no bottom, eh, Mr. Gardner? Delighted to have met you. It's always a pleasure to meet men of keen wit and acute perception."

Out on the road, the young man stopped and laughed.

"Oh, man, thy name is fear!"

A fifteen-minute walk brought him to the Travis Lumber Company. R. B. Cane, the manager, was a man of a different type from Gardner—short, rotund, florid, with a neck that lapped a full inch over his collar.

"I believe," said Trent, "that you have an order for flooring and laths for the new Acme addition—James Preston's job. Is that correct?"

"What of it?" snapped Cane.

"I understand"—fixing steady eyes on the manager—"that the last of it will be delivered by half past four o'clock this afternoon."

"The hell you do!" spluttered Cane. "Where do you get that noise? Who are you, anyhow?"

"Trent's my name. Have you ever been in Atlanta, Mr. Cane?"

"No, I haven't."

"Charming place—pleasant Southern town. There are some, of course, who prefer Leavenworth, if given the choice. Personally I prefer Washington as a place of residence."

Atlanta—Leavenworth—Washington! Slowly a triangle formed itself in Cane's mind.

"What's the idea?" he demanded nervously. "What about Atlanta?"

"Just happened to think of it," said Trent carelessly. "Took a trip there a few months ago. Who do you imagine had the berth across from me?"

"Huh?"

"A man on his way to the penitentiary with leg irons. Bright fellow, too. Chatted with him for a while. Got four years for entering into a conspiracy to injure a business rival. Would you like to hear how it was worked?"

"Never mind," said Cane. "I'll get the stuff there by three this afternoon."

"Stuff?"

"That planking and the laths you were talking about. That's what you asked about, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, now that you mention it. There's no rush—half past four will do. Glad to have met you, Mr. Cane!"

"Good-by," growled the lumber boss.

"If that stuff isn't at the building in two hours," remarked Trent to himself on the way out, "I'll eat every foot of planking, and a couple of bundles of laths for dessert!"

Conversations held with the Terrill Iron Company, concerning a shipment of rods, and with the State Cement Corporation, about a hundred sacks of their gritty product, were along similar lines and equally effective. Well satisfied, Trent returned to Preston's office.

"Well, I think we have the material moving," he reported.

"I think you have!" replied the contractor grimly. "What did you do to Cane?"

"Cane?"

"Yes—Travis Lumber Company."

"Nothing in particular. Merely suggested that he should deliver the laths and the rest of the stuff to-day. Why?"

A broad grin spread Preston's lips.

"He called me up a few minutes ago and begged me, for the sake of old friendship, to forget all about the delay. Promised to shade the price a little if I wouldn't proceed any further."

"Cane, eh? I might have believed it of Robertson or Terrill. What did you tell him?"

"Told him he could consider that the matter had been dropped. What did you pull on him, anyhow? It must have been some hot stuff! That Cane is a real hard-boiled egg."

"Let me see," mused Trent. "What did I say to him? Oh, yes, I talked about the weather—something about the relative climatic conditions of Atlanta, Georgia, and Leavenworth, Kansas."

"Atlanta and Leavenworth!" repeated the other. "Say, you didn't impersonate an officer, did you?"

"I?" exclaimed the young man. "Why, where did you get such an absurd idea? May not one discuss two well-known American cities without—"

"That's rich!" laughed Preston.

"What next?"

"You might drop around to the building, late this afternoon, and see if the stuff has been delivered."

XIII

IN the bright sunlight Trent walked leisurely along Main Street, looking into shop windows. A clock in a jeweler's window informed him that it lacked a few minutes of noon.

"Hello, young fellow!" boomed a heavy voice. "Playing hooky from the lumber pile?"

"How do you do, Mr. Ahearn?"

"On my way to lunch," announced the bank director briefly. "Come with me. Hate to eat alone."

He led the way to the Claridge Hotel, two squares away. When they were seated in the dining room, Ahearn resumed the conversation.

"Still with Preston?"

Trent nodded.

"Heaving lumber?"

"Not to-day. Been spending the morning making some other folks do it."

"H-m! Been sick, haven't you? Look kind of pale around the gills. Noticed it at the bank, too?"

"Not exactly," returned Trent. "I believe I told you that I used to teach school. Too much confinement and routine—that's all that ails me."

"What did you teach?"

"Inductive logic and pragmatic philosophy."

"What's them?" demanded Ahearn.

"Ways to work a lot of bank directors into loosening up?"

"Not directly," smiled the young man; "but knowledge thus acquired may be diverted into useful commercial channels. The fruit of their study is mental poise. I call it the sense of humor. It conquers everything."

"Lower your gun, boy! You're shooting away over my head. I didn't get much schooling. Tell me about it. It must be pretty good medicine if you can go out and borrow ten thousand dollars on your shape with it!"

"I don't want to bore you."

"When you do," growled Ahearn, "I'll tell you. Shoot!"

"Just before I came here," said Trent, "I was working on a thesis—that is, a pa-

per, an article—on the sense of humor. You may know that from the beginning of time philosophy has devoted itself to the propagation of despair and fear and worry. It took the light-hearted primitive man and inoculated him with the germs of anxiety, the bacilli of morbid thought and gloomy speculation. Take almost all forms of religion, for example, Mr. Ahearn—they undertake to uplift you spiritually while crushing you mentally. If you miss trouble in this world, you are promised a quantity of it in the next. I am not speaking from a theological standpoint, understand. I have no quarrel with the soul of any religion, but with the mind. Briefly, the situation is this—when we come into the world we are taught to fear life, and we die worried over our future in the next world. Do you follow me?"

Ahearn nodded.

"Yes," he replied, "I believe I do. I'm a couple of blocks behind, but I haven't completely lost sight of you yet. Go on!"

"When I speak of fear," resumed Trent, "I do not speak of physical fear—the fear that some one stronger than you may punish you bodily. It's the ungrounded fear of the next moment, of the next hour—the fear of four o'clock that you have at half past three. Let me explain further. A man hanging from a rotten limb over a deep chasm becomes frightened when he hears the crackling of rotten wood overhead. That is justifiable fear, for it is logical; but most of us live in perpetual fear that some day we may be hanging from a precipice holding on to a rotten twig. Only those who conquer fear conquer life, and only those conquer who are armed with the sense of humor."

"I thought," remarked Ahearn, "that the sense of humor was something that made you laugh at a joke without much point."

Trent grinned broadly.

"That's one of its charitable manifestations. Pardon me if I use a personal illustration. You understand that I am merely a theorist seeking to apply my theories to the practical things of life."

"Done pretty well so far," grunted the older man. "Got the laugh on us for ten thousand dollars!"

"That's just what I am about to speak of. Had I come into the directors' room that day with the fear of possible failure in my mind, you wouldn't have given me

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a cent. Anxiety would have been in every word I uttered. Remember, I am not bragging. I am scientifically analyzing a situation. Wasn't it your fear and my assurance that won you over?"

"Fear? It was your nerve!"

"Merely another word for assurance. It was your fear, largely."

"I don't make you. I wasn't afraid—"

"There's nothing personal in this," interrupted Trent hastily. "Here's the story. I introduce myself to you as a day laborer. I came to you in garb not associated with manual toil, and I speak in the language of a higher class. You were mystified, then worried. That was the first step. Having plowed your mind with the harrow of worry, I had made it receptive to the seeds of fear. You will remember that I emphasized the consequences of the ruin of Preston to the morale of the city, and its effect in impairing the integrity of those who do business with the bank. I gradually brought you—I mean the directors—to the point where they were afraid that I was right."

"There may be something in what you say," interposed Ahearn; "but aren't you willing to give us credit for occasional decent impulses?"

"I am; but, after all, isn't kind-heartedness a sop thrown to fear—an inward hope that some day, when in need, you yourself will get assistance? Cast your bread upon the waters, it will return to you. Even if you don't expect to be reimbursed in this world, you do in the next, don't you? You wouldn't be in need of a good deed done to you unless you were in some sort of distress; so, while you are doing something for some one in trouble, you are subconsciously, at any rate, visualizing the day, here or in the hereafter, when you will be in need of a helping hand. That's rather involved, but I am merely trying to show how we and our motives are tied together by threads of fear. In other words, while you are lending assistance, you are borrowing the need of it, unless your philanthropy is utterly heartless."

"I don't quite get you," puzzled Ahearn. "Just why did you go to the front for Preston?"

"Purely in the interests of research, and because it appealed to me as a pleasant diversion."

"Well, why is it different when you do a good deed?"

Trent dropped this phase of the subject and entertained his host with an account of the morning's adventures. He liked the blunt Irishman. Ahearn listened attentively. At the end he laughed boisterously.

"Good! I'm damned glad you beat that rat Hope. That's twice you got him in a week."

"Twice?"

"Yes—he raised the very devil about the loan at the bank. Gamble even tried to make me crawl out of it. He's the president."

"I don't understand."

"Didn't you know that Hope is the biggest stockholder in the First National? Gamble's his man, and about eight of the directors dance when he plays. By God, he doesn't own me, though!"

"I see. Tell me, Mr. Ahearn, what do you know of this fight between Hope and Preston? Doesn't it seem strange for the owner of a building to try to impede the work of a man who is employed on its construction?"

"You can't tell what a drunkard will do. Hope's a mean fighter. About the only time he's ever sober is when he's framing some dirty work."

"You seem to know him pretty well."

"Too well," snapped Ahearn. "Some day some girl's father who has a little spunk will bump him off. He's got an idea that every woman in town belongs to him."

"He seems to do pretty much as he pleases," observed Trent.

"Owns about half the town," was the reply, "and all of the city administration. You couldn't get him fined fifty dollars for first-degree murder. Did you ever see him drive his machine downtown? You'd think he was on a speedway." Ahearn's gaze shifted. "There he is now, pulling rough stuff, as usual—and in this hotel. Can you beat it?"

The table was near the door. Trent followed Ahearn's glance. By an open elevator, from which he had apparently just emerged, stood Hope. By his side was Miss Pritchard. Suddenly drawing a fur scarf about her eyes, she hurried from the hotel. Hope followed slowly.

XIV

Soon afterward Ahearn and Trent left the hotel.

"If you need any help, any time, call on me, young fellow," said the bank director

in parting. "That smooth stuff of yours may break down some day, you know."

"Nothing," laughed Trent, "is certain but uncertainty. Thank you."

He walked toward the Acme plant. A block from the building he encountered Staley, who was in high excitement. He seized Trent by the coat lapel.

"Beat it!" he hissed. "There's a copper waiting for you. I've been on the lookout for half an hour."

"A copper?"

"The police, you simp! Beat it, unless you like the idea of spending the rest of your vacation in jail."

"Might not be bad experience. What's the charge, Buck?"

"Don't know. Maybe it's about that damned picture. Gave it back, didn't you?"

Trent frowned. Janet's picture! Publicity! He cleared his mind with a shrug.

"Come on, Buck—let's not keep the law waiting."

"You want to be arrested?"

"Courting it," was the light reply.

"Courting a court, as it were. You will overlook the atrocious pun, won't you?"

"Oh, hell!" returned Staley.

Waiting at the lumber pile was a stranger in civilian clothing.

"That's him," said the assistant foreman, pointing.

Smiling, Trent approached.

"I understand you have been waiting for me. Sorry to have inconvenienced you, but one must lunch, you know."

"Come on!" said the officer curtly.

"The circuit attorney wants to see you."

"The circuit attorney?" replied Trent.

"Well, now, that's indeed hospitality of a high order. Here I am, a perfect stranger, and a high dispenser of law goes out of his way to welcome me to the city! May I inquire—"

"Let's go," growled the detective. "We'll drive over. I don't know what he wants." He gazed, puzzled, into the clear, smiling eyes of the youth. "Maybe it's a mistake."

Trent followed to a small motor car across the street. Ten minutes brought them to the courthouse, a structure that must have been contemporaneous with old Abijah Hope's crossroads store. The circuit attorney proved to be a stooping, nervous individual, irritably astigmatic and sparsely endowed with hair.

"Here he is," announced the officer. "Trent, Mr. Dolan."

"Very well, Doherty. Wait outside here."

The prosecutor led the way into an inner office and motioned the young man to a seat by a flat-topped desk. He took his place opposite.

"Good morning, judge," said Trent. "I believe that that is the usual form in such cases provided, regardless of the hour of the day."

"Know what you're here for?" demanded Dolan.

"Haven't the slightest idea, unless you have been officially delegated by the city fathers to present me with the key to the city."

The circuit attorney thrust forth a finger.

"You're under arrest for impersonating an officer."

"An officer? How interesting! Tell me some more."

"You told Gardner, at the sash company, that you were from this office, didn't you?"

Dolan glared from behind his thick lenses. Trent was silent for a moment.

"Was Hope here," he shot suddenly across the table, "or did he call you on the telephone?"

"He called—say, what are you talking about?"

"Hope did call, and did order you to make this arrest, didn't he?"

"What if he did? No, he didn't. He—"

"Oh, well, let it pass," laughed Trent. "Tell me some more about the charge."

"Didn't you," repeated Dolan, "tell Gardner that you were connected with this office?"

"He says I did, does he?" returned Trent, lightly fingering a paper cutter. "The appearance of a man from this place frightened him, eh?"

"What—"

"And he at once delivered the material that he had been holding back as part of a conspiracy, didn't he?"

"What if he did?" scowled Dolan.

"I wonder," smiled Trent, "if you know how amusing you really are!"

The circuit attorney's fist crashed on the table.

"You think it's a joke, do you? I'll show you. Doherty!"

"Just a minute, please."

Trent's air had become grave. Dolan motioned the detective out.

"Now listen here, young fellow! I can have you indicted for impersonating an officer and have you put away for a year. Do you know that?"

"Really?"

"But," went on the other, watching Trent closely, "I don't want to be hard on you. I'm perfectly willing to drop the matter, if you'll promise to leave town within twenty-four hours."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Dolan. I appreciate it. That"—Trent's tone suddenly became sharp—"is what Hope wants, isn't it? Do you know who I am?"

There was a knock at a door opposite the one through which Trent had entered. Without waiting for an invitation, a young man came in. At sight of the prisoner the newcomer's eyes widened.

"Just a moment, Mac," said the circuit attorney, "and I'll talk with you. I'll be done with this gentleman in a second."

The intruder started to say something. At an almost imperceptible nod from Trent he backed out silently.

"Who are you?" asked Dolan.

"Ah, yes! We were discussing that question before the interruption. Ever have much dealing with the Federal authorities?"

"Eh? Why?"

Dolan's eyes shifted from the other man's quizzical smile. Trent arose.

"Before I go, Mr. Dolan, permit me to give you a bit of advice. Hereafter, before making arrests, find out who it is that you are arresting. Another suggestion—cut away from Hope, and do it quickly. Understand? Don't let him make an idiot of you. You know I didn't impersonate an officer. You merely thought you could frighten me out of town for Hope. Very puerile, my boy, very puerile, the whole plan—almost infantile. I expect to be here for some time, Mr. Dolan." He turned his smiling eyes full on the circuit attorney.

"Any objection?"

Dolan said not a word as Trent opened the door and closed it behind him.

"Wrong man?" asked Doherty.

"Utterly."

The youth who had intruded into the office was waiting at the end of the corridor. Trent extended a hand to him.

"Glad to see you, McAtee!"

"What's the idea, professor? Gone in for a career of crime?"

"Indirectly, indirectly. Tell me about yourself. Live here?"

"Been here about three years. I'm with the *Star*."

"I trust that you have found some commercial value in the wisdom absorbed at my feet."

"I laugh," returned the reporter. "Do you remember that on the first day of the logic course you remarked that you did not expect any one of us to remember what you were going to teach us?"

"It is quite probable."

"Well, in me," said McAtee, placing a hand on his chest, "you may observe the fruition of your gaudiest hopes. I don't recall a thing except the fallacy of the undistributed middle, and I don't know what that's about."

"Yet," returned Trent, "I flatter myself that the acute perception displayed by you in Dolan's office was at least partly the result of the mental training you received in my classroom."

"Perhaps," returned the newspaper man; "but what sharpness of wit I may have I am inclined to attribute to the pursuit of the next meal—which, I may state, is my habitual pursuit. But tell me, professor, what's the idea? Aren't you working the wrong side of the street? I mean—"

"I get you," laughed Trent. "By the way, don't call me 'professor.' It is not only inaccurate but utterly inharmonious."

"How did you happen to drift into this one-horse place?"

"Taking a little vacation."

"Looking the other half over?"

"No—I was a trifle run down, so I thought I'd spend my sabbatical year building myself up a bit, and at the same time test a few academic theories. I've been working on a lumber pile at the Acme Building. However, I have a new job now—or rather a mission."

"Said mission being?"

"To introduce the sense of humor to Hopetown and—"

"The town doesn't need a sense of humor," growled McAtee. "It's a joke now."

"Tell me," went on Trent. "You're a journalist, and—"

"A journalist," interrupted the reporter, "is a newspaper man without a job. I still have one, thank you!"

"Well, then, as a newspaper man, you ought to be well informed. Tell me something about this man Arnim Hope."

"There's mighty little to tell. He owns the town, and chooses to run his property like a damned fool. One of my leading pastimes is suppressing stories about him."

"He owns the *Star*, then, too?"

"He owns the First National," explained McAtee, "and the First National owns us. As a matter of fact, Hope is just a bad boy full of booze and petulance, with more money than most farmers have hay. He has the morals of a satrap and the petty viciousness of a spoiled child. Have you run into him?"

"We have met, and we shall meet some more. I have several months of my vacation left, McAtee, and before I return to Walsingham I hope I shall rid this town of the Hopophobia."

"You've got a swell chance!" scoffed the reporter. "He's got this place so bluffed that it enjoys being stepped on and run over."

"Oh, ye of little faith!" quoted Trent. "All this place needs is an infusion of the sense of humor, and I'm going to do my humble best to provide it. Nothing can stand before it, McAtee."

"I remember you saying so in one of your lectures at which I didn't get my full sleep. Have you tried out any of your snappy theories yet?"

"I have," smiled Trent, "and, as a new friend of mine would say, they're going big. Mr. Dolan, perhaps, will bear evidence—"

"Oh, him!" cut in the newspaper man ungrammatically. "He has a streak of yellow a mile wide, and he's pulled so much rough stuff for Hope that he's always sitting on a hot stove."

"So is nearly everybody in town. Are you afraid of Hope?"

"No, but I'm afraid of the managing editor, and he's afraid of the First National, and it's afraid of Hope."

"Sort of an endless chain of fear, eh?"

"Yes—and you'll be one of the links, if you stick around here long enough. You must have had some mix-ups with him already, the way you talk."

Trent briefly told his former pupil of his encounters with Hope. McAtee shook his head.

"He's dangerous to fool with, I tell you. Get him mad enough, and he's as likely as not to have you bumped off some fine eve-

ning when he's full of hootch. What's the use, anyhow? Hopetown doesn't want to be rescued. The people here have got so used to the young man's rough work that a reformation would actually be resented. If I were you, I would spend the rest of your sabbatical year elsewhere. You'll find darned little that's sabbatical around this dump!"

"My dear boy, nothing could have been more providential than my coming here. I have before me a situation carved to order for the exercise of my theories. It's a clear field for a noble battle—the sense of fear emphasized by every form of philosophy since the beginning of the struggle between thought and the sense of humor."

"Battling Humor, the Walsingham bruiser, in this corner," intoned McAtee, "and Quaking Fear, the Hopetown pride, in this. Oh, well, suit yourself! For the sake of Alma Mater I'm willing to wave a towel for you. Seriously, though, I might be able to help if you get in a jam. Up in the office we have a morgue full of rough stuff about little Arnim, but of course we never could print it. It might come in handy some day when they're counting ten over your quivering form—understand?"

"Thanks, very much! That's good of you, McAtee. You may be sure I'll call on you in case of necessity."

"Drop in any time you get a chance. I'd like to talk to you about the undistributed middle, if you haven't been distributed yourself by that time."

"I wish," said Trent, "that you would keep my presence here secret from any other Walsingham men there may be in town. I don't want the university people to know what I am doing. Might be regarded as *infra dig.*, you know."

"At that," growled the reporter, "it might save you a lot of trouble by pulling you off."

"Trouble," returned Trent, "is like home brew—you make it in your own attic."

XV

THAT evening Trent called on Janet Preston. She greeted him cordially, but a certain nervous reserve was apparent.

"I want you to know, Mr. Trent," she said without preliminaries, "that I greatly regret my treatment of you the other evening. My father has told me of your kindness to him, and—"

"I'm very sorry to hear that, Miss Preston. I should like to have your friendship untrammelled by any thought of a third person, even though he be your father."

Trent hesitated, and a patch of color came into the thin cheeks.

"I see now that I acted like an ingrate," the girl went on.

"You did nothing of the sort," Trent hastened to say. "Your attitude was entirely just. I was at fault. I realize now how insolent and intrusive my action was. What business had I, a stranger, to assume that a photograph you had given to another was out of place in his home?"

"I didn't want my picture there. I don't—"

Suddenly she grew silent.

"Hope promised me," Trent went on gently, "that he would place the photograph in more seemly surroundings."

Janet laughed—a strange, harsh sound to come from her soft lips.

"Promise! The beast never kept a promise in his life. More seemly surroundings! As if any place he frequented could be decent! You don't know Arnim Hope very well, do you?"

"Only slightly, but I don't know you at all. I don't understand—the photograph—didn't you—"

"Yes, yes! I can't explain, but I do want you to know that I hate Arnim Hope. I—I—"

The girl's voice trailed off. Trent's heart pounded pleasantly, illogically. In the spell of silence that followed his eyes rested on her flushed cheeks, her bosom that rose and fell, her fingers that moved nervously. At length she spoke again.

"How is father getting along at the Acme, Mr. Trent? He doesn't confide in me. He has had so much trouble!"

"Very well now, I think. As he expresses it, he is beginning to see daylight. The loan he got at the First National is helping wonderfully. He has an abundance of material on hand, the labor situation is better, and the weather has been ideal. If nothing unforeseen happens, he should get out of the contract with little or no loss. He seems quite optimistic."

"And it's all owing to you! Tell me"—Janet leaned forward—"why are you taking an interest in us—in him? He is a stranger to you, isn't he?"

"It's rather hard to explain. You see," Trent continued haltingly, "I am interest-

ed in some philosophical researches, and your father has come to my assistance in clearing up certain phases."

"He came to your assistance?"

"He did—unconsciously, perhaps, but you'll never know the magnitude of the debt I owe him." He smiled at the puzzled look in her eyes. "I know you are having difficulty reconciling lumber piles and philosophical researches—"

"Not exactly. I knew you were a teacher. Did you teach in Hometown?"

"No—in another city."

The conversation switched back to the Acme plant and the contractor.

"Father," remarked the girl, "is very fond of you. He—"

"Tell me," interrupted Trent boldly, "do you and your father find a community of tastes? I mean—"

Janet laughed.

"We seldom disagree. I like you," she said frankly, "for what you have done for my father, and"—noticing his disappointment—"for what you have done for me. I hope we shall be good friends."

"Then I may call again—soon?"

"You must. I want you to tell me all about your research work, the thesis you are writing. What did you say the specific subject was?"

"The sense of humor."

"Rather a peculiar subject for a staid teacher, isn't it?"

"Staid!" laughed Trent. "Do I make that impression on you?"

For perhaps fifteen minutes longer they chatted on general subjects, ranging from books to the weather, from lumber heaving to Chopin. Then Janet went to the piano and played a few bits. What she played Trent never knew. One can't keep one's eyes and mind on a girl's profile and follow notes at the same time, especially if one is trained to concentration. At ten o'clock Trent rose to depart.

"I'm sorry," said Janet, regarding him gravely, "that I cannot explain the photograph to you."

"Why, Miss Preston, there are no explanations due. If you gave Hope that picture, I am assured that you had a good, sufficient, and honorable reason for so doing."

"If you only know how I hated him, and how it hurts me to have that photograph in his house—"

She checked herself.

"I'll get it back for you, if you wish."

"No, no!" she said hastily. "I can't explain, but for certain reasons—reasons that involve another person—I cannot offend Arnim Hope."

"I believe I know."

"You know!" gasped Janet.

"I'm sorry—"

"Tell me," she demanded, "what do you know?"

"Well," hesitated Trent, "I know your father expected some assistance from Hope in the matter of the Acme contract, and I thought—"

The girl laughed in nervous relief.

"Yes, he told me about that, but that's not the explanation. Another person—a girl—"

"Suppose," suggested Trent, "that we both drop the matter from our minds?"

Janet extended her hand.

"I hope you will call again—soon."

"Almost immediately," was the prompt reply.

Trent walked home in company with a new sensation—an emotion that thudded pleasantly in his heart and clutched delightfully at his throat. On and on he floated through the cool night air. Suddenly he stopped, gazed about, and laughed. He had gone several squares beyond his boarding-house.

In his room he sat for half an hour, fully dressed, on the edge of the bed, reviewing the events of the day with their pleasant culmination.

There came a light knock on the door.

"Come in!" said Trent.

Grace Pritchard entered. The girl's normally pale features were a ghastly white, her eyes held terror, her body twitched with nervousness.

"Are you ill?"

"No, no!" burst from the girl. "I know it's terrible, but I had to come here. I must talk to you! I—"

"But, my dear Miss Pritchard," interrupted Trent mildly, "don't you see—"

"I can't help it. Anyhow, I don't care what anybody says or thinks. I had to see you alone!"

"Tell me," he said gently, "are you in trouble? Can I help?"

She made a gesture of hopelessness.

"I don't know. I don't think any one can help, but I have a feeling that if any one can, you can."

"You know"—Trent pointed—"that Buck is in the next room. Don't you think that it might be—"

"He's not there. He went to a union meeting, and won't be back until midnight."

"Won't you have a chair, Miss Pritchard? I beg your pardon. If you feel that I can help—"

He finished with a gesture. Listlessly the girl seated herself. Trent took the edge of the bed.

"Now," he said encouragingly.

"You saw me to-day"—Miss Pritchard's words came dully—"at the Claridge with Arnim Hope, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"I? My dear girl, it was a matter that didn't concern me."

"Did you tell George?"

Trent regarded her reproachfully.

"I'm sorry, Miss Pritchard, that you should suspect me of being a talebearer."

"I didn't mean that." She wrung her hands together. "George acted peculiarly at dinner this evening."

"Your own gloomy thoughts perhaps suggested that."

"Hope," said the girl, "wants me to go back to him."

"What?"

"I love George," she went on colorlessly, and not speaking directly to Trent. "I haven't the courage either to tell him or to give him up. I wish I were dead, but I can't die. Can't you help me?"

"Miss Pritchard, you seem to be greatly upset about something. Might I suggest that you should retire and get a night's sleep? In the morning—"

The girl aroused herself.

"Sleep!" she cried harshly. "I don't know what it is any more. I can't go on any further. I shall lose my mind. Won't you try to help me?"

Trent placed his hand on the girl's.

"You are in no condition, Miss Pritchard, to tell me what the trouble is, and how can I help you unless I get a clear understanding of what it is that is agitating you? To-morrow morning—"

"I'll be calm," pleaded the visitor.

"Will you listen to me?"

"If you insist."

"Arnim Hope," said the girl, "is my husband. I mean he was."

(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Pride of John Brayborn

A MEMORABLE CHAPTER IN THE ANNALS OF THE TOWN OF
RIVERBANK

By Ellis Parker Butler

SOME of this story was told me by Ned Grange, part of it was known to every one living in Riverbank, and another part came to me because I was living in Chicago at the time when the worst of it happened. It is the story of the proudest man I ever knew and what happened to his pride.

There are various sorts of pride, of course, but more than in any other man I have known they were all combined in John Brayborn. He was a tall, gaunt man, severe of countenance, short and harsh of speech, given to cutting words, and not caring whom he hurt. He was wealthy—one of our wealthiest citizens—and he could afford to pour scorn on those who came to him for what he considered favors. In his hard, ungainly way he considered himself superior to all of us, and he let us know it.

For his workmen—he had the largest plant in Riverbank—he had utter contempt. We were getting a good many immigrants from Germany then. They were from the Plattdeutsch peasantry, and were brought over under contract. There can be no question that some of them were stupid, and we called them all “square-heads,” but John Brayborn treated them like animals.

He paid them eighty cents a day, and as his business was seasonal, they had work for about six months each year. It was not so much that he did not care how they lived, but his cold indifference when accidents happened—when a man lost a hand or broke a leg—seemed inhuman. They were rooted out and forgotten, left to shift for themselves.

I trace all that to his pride. He was so proud of himself and of his own that all the rest of us were hardly more than hu-

man scum, and his workmen were less than that.

John Brayborn was proud of his hard-drawn face because it was the face of his forefathers, whose portraits hung in his big brick mansion on the hill. He was proud of his wealth because he had made it all himself, with no man's help. He was proud of John Brayborn because he had not come to Riverbank as an entirely penniless adventurer, as some had; he came with some few thousands in his pocket.

More than all else, he was proud of his wife, and, later, of his daughter. He felt, I believe, that his wife was a rightful source of pride—more so than other men's wives, because he had created his wealth and his standing, and his standing and wealth had made it possible for him to have that wife.

Mrs. Brayborn was by far the handsomest woman in Riverbank. Indeed, I have never seen a more superb woman. Her eyes, her hair, her figure, and her carriage were all amazing, and her complexion was almost impossibly perfect. Her eyes, brown and liquid, took one's breath. There is not the least doubt that John Brayborn worshiped her. She was the royal crown of all the things on which he built that mighty pride of his.

Bertha, their daughter, was different. Being about my own age, she was in my classes in the lower school grades, and I knew her well until she was sent to a boarding school—one of the first Riverbank girls to be sent to such a school.

I never thought her much different from other girls, except that she was always happy. She had pretty, confiding little ways, always showing something in her pencil box as if it was a great secret, and laughing about it. She was more like her

aunt Kate than like her mother, although her mother was always pleasant enough in a queenly, gracious way.

When Bertha was eighteen or nineteen, she and my chum, Ned Grange, fell desperately in love. Ned was then twenty-six. He had taken over his father's law office, and was doing as poorly as a young lawyer usually does. Old Mr. Grange, who had been in miserable health for years, died two months after Ned went into his office, and what little business the old man had been able to retain went elsewhere.

It was the familiar story of a young man having to make his own start in the world, and Ned was doing the best he could. His office was a mere closet of a room on the second floor of the Opera House Block, a rickety old building on the main street.

I often climbed the worn stairs to visit Ned, for we had always been chums, and we talked of everything under the sun, including Bertha Brayborn. I knew pretty well the progress of Ned's love-making. I have still a clear picture of myself climbing the stairs, and, as I reached the top, seeing Ned open his door and look out.

He had recognized my step, and in his eagerness had opened the door to welcome me. His face was fairly illuminated with joy. He took both my hands and drew me into the office.

"Ned!" I cried, for I guessed his secret.

"She has!" he whispered. "Bertha has! Can you believe it? Isn't it marvelous? Look at me!"

He swung his coat open, as if begging me to see what a poor, miserable, no-account fellow Bertha had chosen.

"See!" he cried. "Here! She put her head right here on this vest—right on this spot. Oh, I must not wear this vest as common clothes any more! This is a sacred vest!"

He laughed almost hysterically and threw off his coat, letting it drop on the floor unheeded, while he removed the precious vest and folded it with the utmost care. He actually kissed the rough cloth. Then he stood holding the vest in his hand, comically looking for a place to put it.

He went over to the old iron safe in the corner, dumped the slender contents of the cash drawer on the floor, and put the vest into it. He locked the drawer and locked the heavy door.

We were both exuberantly happy, but my happiness, of course, was nothing to

his. I was only happy for his happiness, but Ned was happy for himself and the whole world.

"She was wonderful—she is wonderful!" he declared, when we had quieted down a bit.

He tried to tell me what he had said and what Bertha had said, but you can imagine how much consecutive sense I got out of it.

"One thing sure," he told me. "From now on I knuckle down to the hardest work a man ever did. I've got to be worthy of her. Think of it! Think of a girl like that even so much as looking at me!"

He looked at his shabby office with the single window, and the old, ink-spotted black walnut desk, and let out the worry that had been in the back of his head all the while.

"If only it is all right with her father!" he said.

"But, see here," I returned. "Haven't you asked him yet? Haven't you spoken to him at all?"

"I'm to go up to-night and do the lion-bearding," Ned laughed ruefully, and then added, more hopefully: "But I guess it will be all right. I know I'm not much, but he couldn't refuse Bertha anything. No one could refuse Bertha anything!"

"Any one who would refuse his daughter's hand to a man like you must be crazy!" I thought, as I looked at Ned, who was as fine and clean a young fellow as the world ever produced.

But I was prejudiced by my friendship for Ned. As it turned out, John Brayborn was prejudiced by that unbending pride of his.

II

A GIRL like Bertha Brayborn is not shut up in a bottle and kept on a shelf in a dark closet. In a town like Riverbank a girl like Bertha is wherever life and light and happiness are, and she is sure to have a whole string of admirers and suitors and lovers. That was why Ned Grange's triumph was so amazing to him—he had won against so many. Against one, indeed, it seemed that he had not yet won.

Against Roland Overton I could not conjure up one valid objection. He was not too old, although a few years older than Ned; he was a gentleman; he was handsome in a somewhat too manicured way—handsomer than Ned, in fact.

At the worst, I could only muster, as a

reason for not liking him thoroughly, a certain offishness. He seemed to think particularly well of Roland Overton, and never mixed much with the rest of us. He had a great deal of money, and would have more some day; but in Riverbank we never held mere money against any one. A man could have money and be a good fellow.

I saw Ned again the next day. I went up to his office again, but he did not come to his door to meet me. He was sitting by his lone window with his head in his hand—but I imagine you are not interested in the melancholy of a young lover who has all but been thrown out of a house.

He was miserable enough. He felt that life was ended for him—or all of life's joy, at least.

"Bertha was wonderful. She was so kind and so gentle," he told me; but she could not break her father's heart, and that seemed to be what she was sure would happen if she brushed John Brayborn's wishes aside and married Ned offhand.

"I went up there," Ned said, "and Bertha's father met me in that huge library of his, with all the dead and gone Brayborns hanging on the wall. I won't tell you what he called me. It was everything from sneak to pauper; and I, poor fool, probably because I think I am a lawyer, tried to talk back to him."

He laughed ruefully.

"There are ninety-nine reasons why Bertha can't marry me," he said. "John Brayborn told me all of them, one at a time; but I added them up, and the total is John Brayborn. I told him so."

Ned was rather thoroughly crushed. I imagine he felt as insignificant as any man ever felt—a practically briefless lawyer in that miserable cubby-hole of an office, with no money and no clients, and then, as a contrast, John Brayborn in his brick palace, with his four hundred human animals working for him, and his money and his ancestors and his superbly beautiful wife.

There was something pathetic in the fact that Ned was not wearing his vest. It was as if John Brayborn, who had everything, had stepped into the young man's life and taken the little he had.

It seemed that Roland Overton had asked John Brayborn for permission to court Bertha. Roland would have done just that thing, too. It was what John Brayborn in his pride would like, and John Brayborn would not like his daughter—or

his maidservant, for that matter—to go making her own matches without consulting him, as Bertha had ventured to make one with the Ned she loved.

Besides, Ned was nothing much, while Roland appeared to be a good deal. He was an Overton, and Overtons were worthy mates for Brayborns. John Brayborn did not say he was sorry to break Ned's heart. He told Ned that he was a forward young whelp, and that if he did not leave Bertha alone he would have him horsewhipped. I gathered that he said that toward the end of the interview.

III

IN a week or so I had my Chicago offer and went there. I left Ned Grange thoroughly discouraged. He was quite without hope, and I could see no hope for him. In fiction, and sometimes in life, the young hero, when faced by loss of the girl he loves, wrests victory from defeat by a miracle—saving the old man's business, or some such thing; but John Brayborn's business did not need saving.

The fact remained that Ned was a poor young lawyer, the son of a father who had never been much but an invalid and a failure, and that Bertha was a girl such as all girls are. Time heals most wounds. A girl who is forbidden to marry does not take the veil or go into deep mourning. She meets her friends; time passes; the rival, after all, is a nice enough man. I could see nothing but that in a year, or perhaps two years, Bertha would marry Roland Overton or some other man of whom John Brayborn approved.

Ned wrote me now and then. He mentioned Bertha when her name came into his letters naturally, and occasionally he added a postscript in which he showed that he was still as fond of her as ever.

Toward John Brayborn he was bitter. Brayborn was tearing out the woodwork of his house, and having stuff fit for a king's palace put in; Brayborn was building a conservatory, the finest west of Chicago; Brayborn had bought his wife an ermine coat such as only queens wear; Brayborn seemed to be beginning to think he was some sort of god.

The big man was indeed holding his head high those days. He was entering upon the second stage of his career. He had been a money-maker; now he was beginning to be the aristocrat. He was build-

ing his new structure of pride on his wife's beautiful shoulders, on her calm and dignified social graces.

Mrs. Brayborn had been Eugenie Frampton, of the Roger Framptons of one of the large Eastern cities, and marrying her had been a triumph for John Brayborn's pride. He had, in a certain sense, bought her with his own success, for if he had not been successful beyond the average he could never have won her.

Like Bertha, her daughter, she had had plenty of suitors. She had married John Brayborn without loving him, but he had not worried about that. She liked him, and she was the most superb wife any man could hope to have.

Eugenie Brayborn carried her part well; the part that went amiss was Bertha's. Bertha could not forget Ned Grange, and was deeply and annoyingly unhappy. She sulked, if I may use such a word for the gentle fact of Bertha's lack of interest in everything.

John Brayborn was more than annoyed at this—he was angry. He talked to his daughter, and scolded her for lack of pride. What did she mean by moping for that penniless lawyer when she was a Brayborn? He would not have it!

"He's honest, and I love him," was all that Bertha could say.

"Honest? Any fool can be honest!" her father shouted at her.

That was not fair, for John Brayborn prided himself on his honesty. Neither he nor any one of his name had ever done a dishonest thing.

You can see that he had every reason for pride. He was high in his church councils; he was high in the business of the town; he was blessed with a splendid wife; men feared him.

IV

I HAD been in Chicago eight months, I think, when the home paper began to print items regarding Tina Schmutz. The first caught my eye by accident. Tina Schmutz, a domestic in the home of John Brayborn, had been arrested for theft. She had taken a silver spoon, and possibly other articles. The spoon had been found in her trunk, quite at the bottom, under all the girl's belongings.

There was no more in the paper for several days, but I had a letter from Ned Grange, and he mentioned the case, as he

was in the habit of mentioning anything that had to do with the Brayborns. I quote from his letter:

I think it is pretty small business myself. This Schmutz girl is a daughter of one of our "square-heads"—one who used to work for John Brayborn, and who had his right hand cut off. You may remember the case. Brayborn chucked him out like so much spoiled meat, but some one got Schmutz a job as watchman on the railroad. He is the big, moon-faced fellow with tow hair that we used to tease, down in South Riverbank, when we went fishing. Always grinning—you remember him?

This daughter of his is no more than a half-wit, and hardly that. I don't believe she has sense enough to know whether she is stealing or just picking up something pretty, but that is neither here nor there. It is a crime to put a girl in jail for stealing a spoon—undoubtedly her first offense.

That's what Brayborn wants to do—to put her in jail. You may have heard him go on about being honest, and he is on his high horse about this—because it happened in his house, I guess. He went slam-banging into Judge Bruce's court and demanded that the Schmutz girl be sent to jail for life, or something of the sort. You know how he shouts out his orders and expects everybody to obey him.

Judge Bruce would have let the girl off with a scolding, I'm pretty sure, but old John made such a row that the judge postponed the case. There has been the dickens to pay about it ever since. I'm retained to defend the girl, and I'm going to do every bit of defending the law allows, and then some.

You may remember that some of the young women here were stirring around, trying to form a sort of friendly aid society, when you left. They've formed it, and they call it the Welcome Hand Society. They've taken Sam Harder's room on Main Street for a rest room for working girls, and so on. Well, they are in this Tina Schmutz case with all their feet. They are a live lot, too. Bertha was one of the leaders—bless her!—but old John has pulled her out, or so I hear.

It is a big fuss. Those Welcome Hand girls jumped right into it. They sent a committee to see old John, and he gave them nothing but "Hail Columbia," and some more about his home never having been polluted by dishonesty, and so on. Then they went to Judge Bruce. Then they began stirring up public opinion, and I can assure you they have stirred it. All the public opinion there is in this town is up. And there stands old John, grim as Cæsar, demanding only right and justice and jail for a spoon. There isn't much else talked about. The Welcome Hand girls retained me to fight the thing.

I hear that Billy Corwin shot himself in the foot duck-hunting.

And so on. That letter reached me in the morning. About noon I received a telegram from Ned Grange. It said:

Imperative. Go to head of Carwell-Brownson, learn what you can of Mrs. John Brayborn matter. Do what is possible. Coming on first train.

What I did in the matter is not important. I prefer to tell what happened in Riverbank.

V

An hour or two before Ned Grange sent me that telegram the Tina Schmutz case came up in Judge Bruce's court. Usually his court has at most half a dozen spectators; sometimes none at all. On this morning it was crowded to the doors, the corridors were filled, and others stood on the stairs and in groups on the sidewalk below.

A justice's court in Riverbank is seldom formal, and Judge Bruce was the least formal of men. He often sat with his coat off, smoking a cigar, discussing the petty cases that came before him as if he were a benevolent uncle worried by the antics of naughty boys. The gate of his bar was always open, for he had tied it back with a string, and any one who chose walked in and walked out again.

This morning he did not take off his coat and he smoked no cigar. He had asked Officer O'Toole to keep the space inside the bar cleared.

O'Toole, genial and good-natured, was the policeman who had arrested Tina Schmutz. He was inside the bar, and so was Tina, who sat with her head bowed, weeping copiously. With Tina were Lorna Percy and Gay Loring, two of the young women of the Welcome Hand, there to comfort and sustain Tina and to see that justice was done—justice, in their opinion, meaning mercy. Inside the bar, also, were two of the Brayborn servants, one to identify the spoon, and one to tell how, at Mrs. Brayborn's request, she had searched Tina's queer, old-fashioned trunk.

There was no prosecuting attorney. None was customary, and none was needed, for John Brayborn was there to see that harsh justice was rendered. Ned Grange was there to defend Tina. His defense, since there seemed no doubt that she had taken the spoon, was to be a plea for mercy because of the pettiness of the theft and the weak-mindedness of the girl.

"Get on the stand, O'Toole," Judge Bruce said. "Do you solemnly swear—"

John Brayborn interrupted. He raised his gaunt length from the chair in which he had been sitting. His face was hard.

"One minute, judge!" he demanded harshly. "Have I a right to say something? Have I a right, when these people

have stirred up this mush of sentiment, this cowardly attempt to interfere with the course of honest justice—have I the right to say something?"

"Why, yes—go ahead, John, if you want to," Judge Bruce said. "I let folks say their say in this court. Say what you've got to say, John—only I may have to head you off if you go too far."

Brayborn turned to the hundred or more in the room. He raised his bony hand and shook a long finger in their faces.

"I'll say it!" he shouted. "I want to say this—my home is my home. My life and my honor and my pride have been built on righteousness and honesty. My glory is in the purity of my home. If I stand here, the biggest man in this town, and face you and demand the law, it is because what stains my home stains me!"

He was excited—so excited that he trembled, and he was so angry that he stammered his words.

"This girl—this trash," he cried, "this thief, has she a right to bring dishonor on my house, thieving there, and am I not to have the law on her? Clean! We're clean—"

A boy—one of the boys from Brayborn's office—pushed through the crowded aisle and up to the bar, on which Brayborn was resting one hand. He touched the big man's hand.

Brayborn stopped and looked down. The boy held a sealed envelope toward him.

"Wilcox said you got to read this. Now—right away! It came to the office, and he opened it. You got to read it! Wilcox said so."

Brayborn glared at the boy, but he took the envelope and tore it open. The crowd and the court could wait.

Inside the white envelope was a yellow one, torn open, and John Brayborn pulled out of it a telegram. He unfolded this and read the typewritten words. His face went white.

He stood for a full minute, one hand holding the telegram and the other resting on the bar, and his face grew whiter and whiter—ashen white, putty white.

Ned Grange, who was nearest, pushed one of the cheap yellow chairs under Brayborn as the big man's knees refused to hold him.

"Let the girl go!" Brayborn whispered. "Tell Bruce to let her go!"

"Your honor," said Ned, "Mr. Brayborn wishes to withdraw any charge he may have made against the prisoner. He wishes her set at liberty. Is that right?" he asked, turning to Brayborn. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, yes!" Brayborn whispered, and bowed his head, assenting. "And wait, Ned—I want you."

Judge Bruce came down from his bench and whispered with Ned and Brayborn; but Brayborn did not speak, could not say a word. The good judge climbed to his bench again.

"Look here, Tina!" he said. "We're going to let you go. You be a good girl, and don't take things that don't belong to you after this. Go home, now. Court is adjourned!"

VI

WHEN the room was empty of all but himself and Ned Grange, the man of pride put the telegram in Ned's hand. It was from the manager of the hotel at which Eugenie had been stopping. It said:

Your wife arrested this morning charge of shoplifting Carwell-Brownson store. Our house detective tells me charge substantiated, but probably kleptomania. Am doing all possible to keep case out of newspapers, but difficult because importance of party. Please wire instructions. Article taken was pearl necklace considerable value. Advise sending your lawyer immediately, because disposition on part of store to make example of this case.

"I want you to go over, Ned," Brayborn said listlessly. "I don't know—I feel sick—something is wrong with me—my head here."

He drew his hand across his forehead slowly and closed his eyes.

"'We're clean!'" he muttered. "I told them we were clean. You had better telegraph everybody you ought to. Maybe we can keep it quiet. Help me downstairs. Help me home, Ned!"

Ned had to steady him with one arm as they went out of the room and down the stairs.

There was no prison term for Eugenie Brayborn, nor did her name appear in the Chicago papers. Somehow the manager of the hotel was able to keep the affair quiet, and Ned, when he reached Chicago, was able to pacify the managers of the great emporium. I had been able to do little but gather the facts against Ned's arrival.

I saw Mrs. Brayborn several times, before Ned arrived, while he was in Chicago, and when she was going home. She treated the whole affair with complete indifference. She had not taken the pearls, she said; they might have caught on her sleeve or fallen into her purse by accident. That may have been true; but the facts did not seem to point that way.

Ned had assigned to me the task of impressing on her the importance of saying nothing about the matter when she reached home.

"But why shouldn't I?" she insisted. "It has nothing to do with me. I know nothing about the necklace."

She looked at me when she said this, straight into my eyes.

"Don't say anything about it, Mrs. Brayborn," I begged. "It is always better to keep still."

For I did not like the frankness of her eyes. There was nothing behind them; they were the clear, shallow eyes of an irresponsible being. I hoped she had not taken the pearls, but I was afraid.

Ned needed the better part of a week to arrange things in Chicago. For two days, he told me later, John Brayborn was beside himself. He would kill Eugenie, he raved, for she had dishonored him. Bertha quieted him, finally, or his rage wore itself out, and he sat in a great chair, wrapped in a robe, and waited.

When Eugenie reached home, and after she had greeted him in her gracious, queenly way, he sat and watched her, never taking his eyes from her face. He was not sure and he could never be sure. He did not ask Ned what he thought. He never mentioned the affair to Eugenie or Ned or any one, but his pride was broken. He was afraid, always afraid of what might happen.

In Riverbank nothing was ever known of the affair of the pearl necklace. Wilcox was faithful, and Ned would not have told.

"Old Brayborn has come down off his high horse mightily since that affair of the stolen spoon," people said. "It did the old boy good to learn what folks thought of his high and mighty ways!"

Ned wrote me a few weeks after his Chicago trip. He said:

Get your party suit ready. Learn how to walk down an aisle in time to a wedding march. I shall want you to be my best man.

I don't know what has come over Bertha's father. Perhaps he appreciates my noble qualities better, but I'm afraid the truth is that he has somehow lost his grip. I'm happy, anyhow!

Not long ago Bertha and Ned were in Chicago, and they had me take dinner with them at their hotel. We went to a show after dinner, and while Bertha was in her room, powdering her nose or fussing her hair, Ned and I had a short cigar on one of the big lounges in the lobby. We spoke of old John Brayborn, of Bertha's mother, and of Ned's happiness.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "Bertha's father was not such a bad sort when he got rid of that infernal pride of his. Did I ever tell you what he did just before he died? He put ten thousand dollars in my hand.

"In trust, Edward," he said; 'a retainer in trust. I want you to defend any one in Riverbank who is accused of theft.'"

I had no opportunity to say what I thought, for Ned brushed a few flecks of cigar ashes from his knee and arose eagerly.

"Here's Bertha," he said. "Let's go!"

The Listener

A STORY OF THE NEW WONDERS OF THE WIRELESS TELEPHONE

By Jack Bechdolt

MARTIN AVERY took to his bed with a slight indisposition. After the first two days, when the effects of a more than usually severe cold began to wear off, he meant to be up and about; but he delayed rising first one day and then another.

"It's nothing—nothing at all," said Dr. Blanding, who attended him, reporting on the case to Avery's nephew, Harry Keats. "Your uncle has passed his fiftieth year, and he's a little run down—nothing more. Keep him amused. Keep his mind occupied. That's the sort of medicine he needs."

Martin Avery really meant to be out of bed by the middle of the week, but he was not.

The truth is, he found it rather pleasant lying there in his upstairs bedroom in his nephew's home, waited on by Enid, his nephew's wife, and by Harry when he came home from work in the city. Martin Avery tasted the power of an invalid, and he liked its savor.

He liked to hear Enid's light feet running up the stairs when he tinkled the little call bell by his bedside. He liked to see her burst anxiously into the room, her cheeks flushed with her hurry, so pretty and so eager to anticipate his wishes. He liked the way Harry came directly to his

room when he got back from the city, bringing him newspapers and magazines, and frequently a present of fruit or one of the new books. He liked the messages and flowers the neighbors sent in.

Martin Avery argued that he was entitled to these attentions. Suppose he did upset the routine of his nephew's household and put Enid to a lot of extra trouble—was he not going to leave them a very comfortable fortune? Had he not made his will in their favor? In return for that they gave him a home and kind attention. Well, after all, he paid for it, didn't he?

Throughout his life Martin Avery had repressed a natural impatience and a bad temper. He discovered that now, as an invalid, any little indulgence of that sort called for no apologies. It was the right of an invalid to burst out irritably, to make others shrink with hurt. He rather liked that, too.

On the whole, being an invalid was more exciting than the routine of his normal life, which had been somewhat aimless and dreary since his retirement from active business eight years before.

"Just keep him amused. Humor him," Dr. Blanding advised. "He'll come around all right."

Enid and Harry Keats did everything they could think of to follow orders and

keep Martin Avery happy. They did so with redoubled effort because, in his heart, Harry Keats had no real affection for his uncle. He was a quiet, conventional young man of business, holding a good position in the city, and earning a comfortable income. He owned his home in the suburbs, as well as a moderate-priced motor car. He liked almost everybody, and was very much in love with his wife. He believed in family ties, and felt remorse that secretly he was not very fond of his uncle.

Harry Keats came home early on that afternoon in late June, the fifth day of his uncle's confinement. He was flushed, his eyes were bright, and he carried in his arms a mysterious package wrapped in cork board.

"Harry, did you bring the evening papers?" Avery asked.

"Brought better than that," his nephew replied. "Look here—here's something new!"

"Damn it, I wanted the evening papers," Avery growled. "I've told you I always like to keep up with the news."

Harry Keats chuckled mysteriously.

"You'll get the news all right, uncle. You wait!"

"Want the papers!" growled Avery. He rolled over, turning his face to the wall pettishly. He kept up a muttering to himself, aware that it brought tears to Enid's pretty eyes. "Tied down to a bed—maybe my last sickness—like a rat in a trap—you'd think I was no better than a condemned murderer!"

Keats hastily began to unwrap his package, tearing off paper and packing board, and making a great mess. Finally he laid on the bed a compact wooden case, and removed the lid with a flourish.

"Know what this is, uncle?"

Martin Avery gave the mysterious case his attention, but sulkily.

"Eh—what? No, I don't. Looks like one of those fool electric ray machines quack doctors use."

"It is an electric machine," Keats said proudly. "Look, uncle! Look, Enid! It's one of these new radio telephones—wireless, you know. I was going past a store where they were demonstrating them, and it came over me like a flash. 'The very thing for Uncle Avery!' I said. I went in and listened to one, got a demonstration, and found out how to set it up. See here! Concerts every hour, you know,

from a central sending station. Why, you can lie right here in bed and hear singers and bands and vaudeville by wireless—sermons, too, on Sundays. You can hear ships talking out at sea, and news bulletins given out every hour—a regular hourly newspaper!"

Avery's interest brightened.

"News, you say? Every hour? Well, well!"

"Every hour—news while it is happening. The central broadcasting station gives a bulletin service, the scores of ball games, sports of all sorts, robberies, scandals—everything—"

"And I can lie here in bed and hear it?" Avery asked.

"Hear everything with this thing over your ears." The nephew displayed the wireless operator's headpiece. "All I have to do is tie a wire out of this window to that big oak down at the end of the lot, and you can lie here and hear all the world go by, just as if you could be in a dozen places at once."

The semi-invalid felt he had betrayed too much interest. It pleased his hosts too well.

"Oh, all right, all right!" he grumbled impatiently. "Why don't you start your toy going? Do something! Don't just talk about it!"

Harry Keats got out a coil of wire, sent Enid for the hammer and nails, and began to bustle about. He paused, remembering something forgotten in the excitement of the new purchase.

"Oh, Uncle Avery, who d'you think I ran across to-day? He sent you his best regards, and was mighty sorry to hear you were laid up. Said he'd try to call soon. It was Peter Holloway."

Martin Avery was conscious that he had stiffened, conscious that his face was not seemly to look at. He pretended to suffer a sudden twinge of pain and turned his face away. With his back to his nephew, he managed to murmur with a fair counterfeit of unconcern:

"Peter Holloway, eh? Very kind; very kind, indeed, of Peter Holloway."

But Keats, busy setting up the wireless antenna, had the impression fixed in mind that Peter Holloway's message had not been the success he anticipated.

"Guess I kind of put my foot in it," he thought slowly. "Guess I sort of stepped on shaky ground. Maybe he doesn't think a lot of his old partner."

Keats was right. Martin Avery hated Peter Holloway.

II

MARTIN AVERY's interests, his human ambitions, likes, and dislikes, had dwindled and died until he had no real interest left but one—his bitter hatred of Peter Holloway. It had been slow in forming, and its gradual accretion made it now an unshakable structure, just as a slow-forming friendship grows to withstand the shocks of life.

Lying quiet in his bed while his nephew bustled with the radio telephone, Avery thought back over the intricate maze of events, and traced this red thread of his life back to its beginning.

It was a long thread and twisted, and at the start of it was an untidy heap of pencil sharpenings scattered over a rug, and a half-smoked cigar disfiguring a varnished desk. That began the hatred. Just as surely as day begins with the first flush of dawn, Martin Avery began hating Peter Holloway because of a heap of lead-pencil shavings and a discarded, smoking cigar.

The day the red thread entered the pattern of his life Avery was thirty-six years old, and the proprietor of a small but not unpromising business. The man had a certain patient genius for building games and puzzles. He was not a playful man, and had never been a playful boy, but he could devise games that boys and men enjoyed.

For instance, he could, and did, sit for hours dealing poker or bridge hands, and carrying on intricate calculations to prove how often certain combinations of the cards would appear. He would roll a marble toward a pocket hedged about with pegs to carom it off, and roll and roll it with everlasting patience, to determine the necessity of adding or eliminating a hazard. Given almost any sort of idea to start on, he would devise some kind of diversion that would interest or amuse others.

When Holloway made his acquaintance, Martin Avery had followed this profession of game-making for some years with indifferent financial success. He owned a number of patents and copyrights, and manufactured in a small way. It was Holloway who saw the opportunity to do big things with Avery's inventions.

Where Avery was long, lean, sallow-faced, and repressed, Holloway was broad and thick, and had a flushed face with pink

cheeks and bright eyes. His manner was boisterous and full of vitality.

Avery had patience and a certain secretive ingenuity; Holloway had personality, imagination, and daring.

Avery habitually spoke quietly. His habits were the neat and tidy habits of the cat. Holloway had a voice that boomed. His habits were untidy, and his hearty voice and pouncing restlessness roused a prickling dislike in Avery—just as all cats, by nature, dislike the open, hearty ways of all dogs.

It was a queer business partnership that began that day. It made Martin Avery comfortable for life; for Peter Holloway it made a large fortune. And with every step of its progress toward success, Avery's dislike of his partner, which began when Holloway sharpened a pencil over his office rug and left his half-consumed cigar scorching the varnish of a desk, waxed and fattened and blossomed into a poisonously brilliant growth, with petals the hue of blood.

After a time a difference of opinion arose between the partners. Avery, having calculated all the chances with his infinite patience, felt sure that the business could be extended no further without a smash. Holloway was equally sure that they had not yet begun to realize the profits in it, and proposed to spend large sums for advertising and sales campaigns. The result was that Avery sold out for a sum that assured him a permanent income.

He sat idle a year and another year, waiting to hear of Holloway's ruin. Instead, Holloway grew rich and richer, and the games that Avery had invented bore Holloway's name as their manufacturer. Then Avery hated his partner with a hatred compounded of the old, catlike loathing of the hearty, vital man; of petty jealousy, and of indignant astonishment that for once he had calculated and got the wrong answer.

When the International Academy of Inventors elected Peter Holloway to its honorary presidency, and proclaimed him a man who had benefited mankind by his ingenuity, Avery's obsession flamed into a passion that sometimes shook him beyond all his powers of repression. Holloway living in luxury in his fine home near Cobden; driving his high-powered motor car to the country club; famous as a great inventor because of the very games that he, Avery,

had invented! The name alone was enough to rouse in him something so powerful that he was afraid of it.

He writhed to think that blundering Harry Keats had let Holloway know of his illness—had let Holloway have the satisfaction of picturing him a broken, feeble old man, dependent on the hospitality of his kin.

Sick? He never was stronger in his life! He was strong in his purpose to prove to Peter Holloway, finally, beyond any doubt, who was the better man. He was strong to satisfy the fierce and deadly hunger in his soul.

III

"ALL right, uncle! Want to hear it work?"

Keats had come back, Enid with him. The nephew connected cords to binding posts and slipped the telephone receiver harness over the invalid's head.

"Now we tune it," the young man went on. "Got to catch the correct wave length, you see. We turn this little dial very slowly and move this little jigger—it's called the cat's whisker."

"Reminds me of the first talking machines," said Avery, interested in spite of himself. "I can remember how we had to stick things into our ears to hear Sousa's band play a piece. Well, come on, Harry—let's hear it talk!"

He became absorbed in listening. His eyes closed as he concentrated his thoughts on the microphonic murmur in his ears.

"Think of it!" exclaimed Enid. "The air full of talk—whispers from all over the world going right through our house!"

The two men hushed her anxiously. Keats tuned and turned dials and watched his uncle's face.

"Don't get anything," Avery complained. "Now I do—a big buzzing—*buzz, buzz, buz-z-z.*"

"A wireless telegraph is sending somewhere," Keats interpreted.

"Now kind of a little squeak—*eee-e-ek, eek, eek.* Now nothing again. Well, boy, why don't it—"

Avery almost forgot to breathe. The echo of music, fairylike, tinkling, caught his attention. He tried desperately to follow the sounds. Abruptly the accompanying chorus of squeaks and buzzings died away, and the music was at his bedside. He nodded his head.

"Very pretty! Pretty toy!"

Presently the novelty of it wore off, and Avery removed the harness.

"It makes my head ache," he complained.

Enid listened to the music, delighted. Then Harry put on the harness, grinned, and tried a dance step.

"Can't you let me listen a minute?" Avery burst out, annoyed to be forgotten. "Bad enough to have to lie here all day and all night!"

Harry yielded the receiver, and Avery listened again. He heard a voice speaking slowly, carefully—the voice of the operator at the broadcasting station reading the evening news summary. The invalid's expression became absorbed.

"H-m!" he said finally. "Quite a murder case over in Newark to-day—big merchant found dead in a city park, and they can't make out who did it. Police shot a loft burglar in New York, too."

When Dr. Blanding called next day, he found the invalid listening to the morning news summary. He thoroughly approved of the wireless telephone.

"The very thing! It'll keep his mind off his troubles. Fine!" He surveyed Martin Avery with delight. "Well, well, well! Vaudeville at the bedside! We invalids certainly live like kings in these wonderful times! Pretty music, Avery?"

Avery took off the harness reluctantly.

"They haven't got any clue to the fellow who murdered that merchant in Newark," he announced. "Looks like he'd get clear away."

"Well," said the doctor, bustling, "guess it's about time you got out of bed. Feel all right now, don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"What, what? Fiddlesticks! Cold's all gone. Have you out of bed in no time."

"More likely I'll never get up again," Avery grumbled, put out by this optimism. "My heart feels funny."

"Heart! That's liver, my boy. Anyhow, let's listen a minute to that old heart of yours."

Dr. Blanding got out his stethoscope. Adjusting it, he paused to remark:

"By the way, Avery, I saw a man who says he's coming to see you soon—old Pete Holloway."

The doctor bent his head to listen, and a startled look, fleeting but unmistakable, passed over his face. Holloway's name

had started Avery's heart racing. Blanding faced his patient sternly.

"You been taking any patent dope for headaches?" he demanded.

"Not for some time—no."

"H-m! Your heart acts like you might have been."

"I sometimes take those Ajax pills," Avery said.

"Don't ever do it again. Bad for the heart. All that patent stuff has drugs that play hob with your heart action. Some of 'em are strong enough to kill a horse. Ajax is about the worst of all."

Avery was interested.

"That so? I suppose if a man was to take that stuff, a doctor would think his heart had got drunk, eh?"

"Known it to happen. Known it to fool doctors," Blanding admitted. "Anyway, you lay off that stuff—mind!"

IV

LATE in the afternoon Avery, who had been unusually thoughtful, sent for End.

"You know I've been suffering with headaches," he said. "I asked Dr. Blanding about it this morning, and he suggested that I might try some Ajax pills, if I didn't feel better. I feel worse, and I wish you'd have the drug store send up a large package. I want them right now."

Enid got him the pills. Avery professed to feel better at once, and instructed her to put them away in the family medicine cabinet. Should he want to take one, he was quite capable of walking as far as the bathroom, where they were kept, and Dr. Blanding would never see them in there.

The day had been unusually warm, and Avery was irritated by the monotony of staying in bed. Invariably thoughts of his little grievances and annoyances gave way to thoughts of Peter Holloway. It was as if his hatred for Peter, the one real thing in his life, was the lodestone that drew all the scraps of petty jealousies and troubles. It was the one thought that could hold his interest and even thrill him.

He knew his old partner's daily life, all his habits. In his hatred, he gathered up every scrap of gossip and information about Peter Holloway until he came to know everything that he did, and exactly how he enjoyed the prosperity which, Avery considered, was rightly his own.

For instance, this was a Tuesday night. At this particular moment Peter Holloway

would have finished a family dinner in his home at Cobden, and would be telephoning to the garage for his roadster. Within half an hour he would drive to the country club, because on Tuesdays and Thursdays he played bridge with three old friends. Just about one o'clock in the morning, not varying more than a quarter of an hour either way, Holloway would drive himself home again, to bed.

This vision of Holloway's plain, pleasant, comfortable life made Avery furious. He resented the man's every pleasure, he resented his possessions, he even resented his having old friends.

"Mine!" he thought. "House, car, country club, money to throw away at penny-a-point bridge—all mine! Even the friends—he stole them from me, damn him!"

Harry Keats came into the room.

"Oh!" Avery exclaimed bitterly, glad to have somebody to quarrel with. "Thought maybe you'd forgot you had an uncle. You might at least hitch up that newfangled telephone, so I'd have something to do."

Keats got out the telephone, which stood by the bedside, and which Avery might just as well have connected up for himself. With his usual good humor, the nephew turned to the broadcasting station wave, and put the harness over Avery's head. They sat in the warm dusk, Avery listening, the nephew attentive.

"Bah!" Avery exclaimed. "Music! I can hear that on any talking machine. Here!"

He pushed the toy aside. His nephew put on the earpieces.

"Here's something new about that Newark case," Harry said presently. "Remember the man that was killed in a park—"

Avery snatched at the harness.

"Give me that. I want to listen!"

After a time the invalid grunted:

"Police will never get the fellow that killed that Newark man. He was too slick for them!"

"They will some day," Keats argued. "Murder always comes out."

"Fiddle! You read that stuff in your copy book! Hundreds of murderers never get found out; and there's more and more murder done, as men get to realize that. Police stupidity is to blame for this crime wave. Here's another case on the line

right now—policeman killed by gangsters in New York. They'll never be caught—not one chance in a hundred—not if they've got any brains!"

"Maybe the police won't get them," Keats argued; "but, uncle, *somebody* always makes men pay for crimes like that. They come to judgment, always. Maybe it's God—"

"Harry, don't be a fool if you can help it! Any man that knows how to use his head and calculate his chances can do all the murder he likes, and get away with it. Look at the newspapers. Listen to the reports over this telephone, like I have. Figure it out for yourself. Crime everywhere—murder, robbery, arson. The very air is full of it these days."

In those unusually hot days of early summer it seemed that the air was full of crime, as Avery said. The daily news was spiced with it—so spiced that even a well-balanced palate was debauched by its piquancy.

Avery, with little to do but listen to the whispers of the world, brought to his bedside by radio, began to develop a queer enjoyment of his life. Much of the time he kept the telephone at his ear. At any hour until late evening it whispered of the world, and of the evil that is in the world. Evil, always evil! The chorus that rode the air, to Avery's perverted ear, became a chorus of nothing but evil—a world-wide hymn of wrongdoing.

There was other news—good news—news of hope, aspiration, accomplishment. At first seeking only material to build up his argument to Harry, later delighting in the blood-taste of it until his judgment warped, Avery cast aside the good and listened only to the evil.

Weird, hot days of an early summer, abnormal, they seemed to loose the evil passions of mankind. The papers talked of the crime wave, and either blamed or defended the police as their bias was. They told of a murder here, an outrage there, official blundering in a third case. Juries disagreed about evidence flagrantly plain. Technicalities ruled the courts. Justice winked her eyes.

Daily, hourly, the world whispered its bloody secrets in Martin Avery's ear, and the invalid listened with ever-growing fascination. At night he argued with his nephew, confounding him with the day's statistics.

"It's got to be a question of nerve—that's all there is to it," he declared one baking, breathless evening. "That 'murder will out' idea is stuff and nonsense, and always was. Figure it out for yourself. Look at the facts!"

Harry Keats, lacking an argument, grimaced.

"Anyway, I'd rather listen to the music."

"Listen to it!" his uncle said contemptuously. "Sentimental twaddle! A clever man, a man who gets things done, doesn't bother with that. He faces facts—real facts; and he figures from facts."

Dr. Blanding next day took Harry Keats and Enid aside, and spoke with grave face.

"Your uncle's heart is acting queerly. Frankly, I am worried about him. It is my duty to tell you that his indisposition has taken a grave turn—a very grave turn. Martin Avery may prove a mortally sick man."

"Well, uncle"—Keats greeted him that evening with more than usual kindness, because of the doctor's serious report—"how's the crime wave?"

"Fix up this damned machine!" Avery growled. "It won't work right any more—kind of faint and blurred. Nearly drove me wild this afternoon, buzzing and squeaking in my ears. Make it go!"

Avery had the harness over his ears, and his nephew fiddled and fussed with the wave length and the cat's whisker and the crystal. The invalid spurred him on with complaints.

For a moment the buzzing cleared away, and he heard the evening news broadcast. He listened, nodding his head. Crime again—a brutal murder in Chicago; in San Francisco a bandit running amuck.

"Brains! Anybody with brains can get away with it," he chuckled.

He listened again. Suddenly his face changed. Beads of sweat glistened on his sallow skin. Without warning he sank back among the pillows, his hands clawing at the earpieces.

In his ear the voice had repeated:

KANSAS CITY—For the murder of his wife and children, a crime which went undetected for twelve years, Max Coon to-day died in the electric chair at the State penitentiary. The condemned man collapsed and had to be dragged to the chair.

"Take it away!" Avery whispered. "Take that damned toy out of my sight!"

But a few minutes later he was begging for it again.

"Give me that wireless. Damn it, I've got to listen to something intelligent. It might as well be that!"

But the machine was dead.

"Fix it," Avery commanded.

Harry Keats could not set it right.

"It must be that the crystal has worn down," he decided.

Avery flew into a passion.

"Get a new one! Do something!"

"I can't get a new one until to-morrow, uncle. I'll get one when I'm in town—sure I will."

The whispers had stopped, and Martin Avery was isolated. All the next day he missed the world's voice in his ear, whispering of things he wanted to hear.

His temper was terrible. The man was frantic. That chorus of crime and wrongdoing, the scandal of the world, had become like strong drink to Martin Avery. Like a powerful drug it was—a drug that roused something in him both terrible and alluring.

When his nephew came home he was shaking in his eagerness.

"Well, Harry! Well! Fix up the wireless, boy. Let's get the news!"

"Uncle, I'm awfully sorry," Harry Keats began.

"What? What the devil?"

"That broken crystal—the store was out of them. To-morrow—"

Avery burst out terribly.

"To-morrow! You tell me you can't fix the wireless till to-morrow? You didn't try. You didn't look for it. You bungled the job. Damn you, what do you care how you treat me?"

The outburst left him shaking and white. It was shocking to see him.

All evening he raged and brooded, and nephew and niece tried in vain to calm him. Finally he grew calmer, ignoring them altogether, but it was a brooding, bitter quiet that made these simple people deeply unhappy.

They left him alone, begging him to sleep. Martin Avery lay in the warm dark, thinking, thinking of what the world had whispered and of the hate that nourished him.

"News!" he muttered once. "I'll give them news to talk about, one of these days!"

When Harry and Enid looked in on him,

close to midnight, he seemed to have dropped into peaceful sleep at last.

V

THEY had news to talk about the very next morning. Harry Keats brought the morning paper to his uncle with a grave, thoughtful face. He wondered if it were wise to let the invalid suffer the shock of that terrible intelligence.

Peter Holloway was dead—murdered. The newspapers were black with the horror of it.

Martin Avery's former partner, the man who made fortune and fame from his games, had been found dead beside a lonely road, his automobile overturned near the body. At first they thought it an accident; then those who found him saw the bullet wound in his head and pieced together the story. Driving home from the country club in the early morning, returning from that weekly game of bridge with old friends, Holloway had been killed by an assassin hidden beside the road. With no hand to guide it, the car had swerved, jumped a culvert, and overturned.

Peter Holloway had been murdered in cold blood, and there was not a clew to point out the man who had murdered him.

Dr. Blanding stopped with Harry and Enid after his morning call, and made the daily report.

"At least he seems no worse than yesterday. Heart erratic, very. Can't make out the reason for it; but Holloway's death—the shock of it—well, it doesn't seem to have caused any serious harm."

That evening Harry replaced the broken crystal in the radio telephone, and Avery could lie in bed, day and night, and hear the world's whispers again. When reference was made, as often happened, to Peter Holloway's murder, his attention became rapt, insulating him from everything else in the world.

Just as the Holloway case seemed doomed to take the course of so many of those current mysteries in which Avery delighted, something happened. The police arrested a suspect, and within a month one Carl Finch, a gardener on the Holloway estate who had been discharged for misbehavior and petty stealing, was awaiting trial for murder.

From the first the case against Finch looked black for the man. He had a deadly grudge against Holloway, and had not

concealed it. He had made threats. The State found evidence that he had bought a weapon at about the time of the murder—a revolver of the same caliber as the bullet in Holloway's body. Witnesses saw a man answering his description on the road not long before the hour when Holloway was killed.

Still more damning was the fact that on the morning after Holloway's death Finch left his wife and two children, without a word of explanation, walked fifteen miles, and caught a freight train bound west. The actual fact, as Finch told it later, was that he ran away because he had heard of Holloway's death. He realized that he had done and said things that laid him open to suspicion, and got into a panic.

When Finch came to trial, his defense was an alibi. He claimed that he spent the night of the murder in a poker game with three other men who were waiting for an early morning train that was to take them to a steel construction job in Los Angeles. But the other men could not be found. The court granted delays, and gave Finch every possible opportunity to find all or any of his witnesses, and the man failed. When at length the case was called, public opinion had him convicted before he said a word.

"It's just wonderful how Uncle Avery keeps up his spirits," Enid commented at this time. "He has the active interests of a boy, listening all day at the wireless. Nobody would guess that—that the end—that he is dangerously near death."

Dangerously near death Martin Avery seemed, for Dr. Blanding knew nothing about the strong drug that his patient had hid away. Nor did anybody know that the pistol Martin Avery had kept hidden in an old tin cash box for years was there no more, but was rusting at the bottom of a pond. Nor did they guess that one hot midnight the old bicycle stowed away in his little workshop had made a trip of twelve miles—as far as the scene where Peter Holloway met his death, and back again.

They only knew that Martin Avery, who seemed to be at the point of death, kept up his spirits with rare courage.

VI

WITH all his skill at simulation, Avery could not entirely hide the change Finch's trial made in him. Lying thus in bed, ap-

parently at the point of death, surrounded by every thoughtful attention, winning praise from all who knew him for his fortitude and cheerfulness under affliction, he, alone of all the world, appreciated fully the satiric comedy of the Holloway murder.

Not only had he done what he planned, inspired by the devils that whispered in the air—murdered Peter Holloway without attaching a trace of suspicion to himself—but chance had added heaping measure to his success by placing another man in jeopardy for the crime.

The effect of this on Avery's spirits made a physical change which no amount of acting could entirely hide. He maintained the fiction of his illness. He still drugged his heart into erratic performances, but with more caution now that the vital need was past. He contemplated gradual recovery, and he set the time for his recovery to follow the execution of Carl Finch.

That seemed a most appropriate time to Avery. He began to look forward to it—to count the weeks and days.

Then something happened that disturbed him.

There had been slight protest from a few people at the time of Finch's sentence to death. In view of the nature of the evidence against the man, and his strong assertion of his innocence, the sentence seemed too severe. Kind-hearted people protested that life imprisonment would effect punishment and still leave the way open to reparation if by any possibility a mistake had been made.

Two weeks before the date of Finch's execution—the date which Avery had set for the turn in his health—the movement crystallized in a petition asking the Governor for a reprieve. The very fact of Finch's poverty and his lack of friends had won him the friendship of many.

Dr. Blanding, who had been growing optimistic, looked suddenly grave concerning his patient. He was inclined to shake his head ominously.

"But there's one good sign," he said: "he still has that lively interest in everything that's going on in the world. He listens all day on the wireless."

The doctor made this remark on the day set for Finch's execution. He had good cause to comment on his patient's interest in the wireless telephone.

Avery wore the headpiece continuously, waiting with badly concealed impatience

for word of Finch's fate. The weather was hot and muggy, and the sweat poured down his face. The constant pressure of the receivers was torture to his tired ears; but still he listened for the whispers from the air, fiddling constantly with the detector, changing his wave length, straining every nerve to catch news of the Governor's answer to the petition.

At noon he got his answer. Governor North saw no reason to interfere with the course of the law, and Finch would be sent to the electric chair at ten o'clock that night. The Governor was leaving for a yachting vacation that same afternoon.

Avery took off the headpiece with hands that shook. He wiped his streaming face and lay back weakly, knowing a contentment which he had missed these many days. He slept peacefully until evening.

At six o'clock, so strong had habit become, he was listening again to the regular evening broadcast. Out of the commonplace of the day's news, sandwiched between a new ragtime song and the weather forecast—to dispense such trivialities had men explored the mysteries of the ether—the magic voice announced:

The following dispatch has been received from San Francisco:

A man who gave the name of Joseph Murphy notified the district attorney to-day that he is wanted as a witness in the case of Carl Finch, found guilty of the murder of Peter Holloway and condemned to die in the electric chair at Delawanna Prison this evening. Murphy has made an affidavit that on the night of Holloway's death he and two other men engaged in a poker game with Finch, that the game lasted until morning, and that Finch never was absent from their sight during that time.

Murphy has just landed from a voyage, and first heard of Finch's conviction to-day. Authorities of Delawanna County are endeavoring to communicate with Governor North, who is at sea on a yachting trip, with the object of getting him to stay the execution.

This news left Avery panting. Coming thus at the last minute, when the Holloway affair seemed settled for all time and his own security doubly sure, it was no less than a personal affront. It was as if the devil of fate that engineered the affair had turned against him unexpectedly; as if what had been a prime joke on the other man threatened suddenly to be a joke on him. The squeaking imps of static were laughing in the earpieces, jeering him, like a derisive chorus of the imps of hell riding the air and gloating over his discomfiture.

Enid came into the room with his evening meal, but Avery waved her aside. It was too hot to eat, he said. He refused to be separated even for a moment from the telephone receivers. He burst out irritably at her anxious concern. Coming in like this with her chatter! Breaking into things when he was straining every nerve and muscle and brain cell to catch word of his own fate!

"Let him keep the telephone," Keats counseled. "It's the only thing that keeps him happy and interested."

So Avery listened, and the hot, sticky minutes added up into hours. Several times nephew and niece came to his chamber, only to be waved out. Their presence disturbed his vigil.

In grim fortitude he bore with the evening program of music, waiting and waiting for the news he sought. The interference of a powerful wireless telegraph, with its loud buzzing, and the squeaking of an atmospherical disturbance, annoyed him sorely. Twice he lost the wave entirely, and terror made him cold at the thought that in those intervals of silence he had missed what he sought. At length he caught, in a fragment, fresh news:

—to reach Governor North. The most powerful radio stations along the coast are working to pick up the yacht Flattery, which is equipped with a radio plant, but an electrical storm at sea has broken off all communication. Unless word is received soon, the execution of Carl Finch must take place as planned.

At last he knew what it was to draw a deep breath again. So intense had his pre-occupation grown that his very life seemed to be bound up in the fate of Carl Finch. Once more he felt deliciously safe. An electrical storm at sea! Fate, the cynic, had turned the joke on Finch, and Avery could lie in bed, twisting his bloodless lips into a smile.

Even the squeaking witches' chorus that rode the air was laughing with him now!

A band at the forecasting station was playing a jazz number, and Avery found himself humming the air, even wriggling his shoulders to its rhythm. The number ended abruptly, and the calm, unhurried, mechanical voice read a new bulletin:

Delawanna Prison reports that Carl Finch has just said his last good-by to his wife. Mrs. Finch is leaving the prison. The chaplain is with the condemned man.

Please stand by a minute for further bulletin.

A break, and then even the broadcasting announcer lost a little of his calm.

Cape May wireless has reached the yacht Flattery. Governor North has received word of new evidence in the Finch case. A reply is expected at any moment.

The pulses were pounding in Avery's ears. The beat of blood half deafened him. He tried with all his will to slow his heart. He must listen! Every faculty and nerve was alert for more.

Silence again—a terrible silence. Then he groaned aloud. The broadcasting station band had started braying more ragtime. The music wavered in his ears, grew tenuous, swelled grotesquely. Was it his pulses hammering?

He glanced at the sky. The night had thickened, blackened, knit into a heavy, muffling pall that closed in about him. An electrical storm was gathering—the same storm, perhaps, that had cut off the Governor on his yacht. The static began to chatter louder, as if the mocking fiend's chorus rode the storm cloud.

Suddenly clear words came:

Bulletin from Delawanna Prison, just received: No word here from Governor North. It is feared electrical disturbances have again cut off the yacht Flattery. Prison authorities refuse to delay the execution of Carl Finch, lacking authority from the Governor. The condemned man is being taken from his cell to the death house.

A pause, and again:

Carl Finch has entered the death house. It now lacks five minutes of the hour set for his execution.

Avery realized in a dim sort of way that sweat was pouring off him. His face streamed with it.

But he no longer lived there in a bed, listening at a radio phone, with a head-piece clamped tightly over his tired ears. In imagination he walked with Carl Finch in Delawanna Prison, five miles distant. He walked through the steel and concrete corridors in the hot, close night, and a sweat of terror wet him through.

As he walked, his limbs seemed detached things, moving without any will of his own. A kind of numbness was upon him; and yet he knew what awaited him behind the door that opened to admit him into a dim

chamber where a few men waited beside a chair.

He was in the chair, and his arms and legs were strapped. He was tied helpless in it, living through a terror that knew no measure of time. Bands pressed his head, pressed it as if to burst. He knew—the electrodes!

The sinister metal contacts seemed to burn his skin. In a moment it would end—everything would end. For the murder of Peter Holloway he would die in the electric chair.

In a frenzy, he tried to think of that last appeal to a divine judge. His dry tongue tried to say:

"Into Thy hands, O Lord!"

His tongue could not move; but his ears heard a scream—a mad, inarticulate scream of mortal terror—his own screaming.

The scream ended in a blinding flash, and for Avery the world ceased to be.

VII

AVERY's nephew, Harry Keats, babbled to Dr. Blanding in a panic of remorse and self-accusation.

"My wife told me! Enid warned me! She begged me not to let him, for fear of the storm; but there's a lightning-arrester on the wireless, doctor. Lightning couldn't hurt it. And he was so absorbed in listening that he wouldn't let us come into the room. I tell you the lightning couldn't have touched him. The apparatus isn't touched—there isn't a sign. How could it have—"

Dr. Blanding turned from his examination of the dead man.

"Harry," he said kindly, "the lightning didn't touch him. There isn't a sign of burn or scar on him—not a sign of any injury whatsoever. Your uncle died from sudden shock—the shock of a lightning flash, too severe a shock for his overworked and weakened heart; but the bolt didn't strike near here. It must have been several miles away."

Dr. Blanding was right. They learned later that the lightning had struck at Delawanna Prison, and that the effect of the bolt was to destroy the prison power plant.

The same stroke that killed Martin Avery saved the life of Carl Finch.

EDITORIAL NOTE—For several years MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE has followed the spelling of the Standard Dictionary. Beginning with the present number our orthographical style will be that of Webster's New International Dictionary.

A Clean Steal

A LIVELY BASEBALL YARN FROM A SPRING TRAINING CAMP

By James W. Egan

IN the spring, they tell me, a young man's fancy is apt to turn to a certain well-known affliction; but if he's a husky, healthy young cooky with a tolerable throwing arm, a set of lungs in good working order, and the average American ambition, you're a lot more liable to find said fancy veering toward balls and bats, sweat shirts and spikes, and the good old diamond.

When March winds roar and April showers pour, as they too often will, the baseball factories are bursting into business all over this land of the dry and home of the crave, and training camps for aspiring athletes dot the map like small boys infest the banks of a swimming pool. Youthful phenoms flock in faster than a married man's bills. The bush league bearcat and the sand lot slugger have their hour—and sometimes an hour is their time limit.

But of course the old idols ain't like a politician's alibis—they can't go on forever. Sooner or later the legs grow stiff and stubborn, the eyes dim, or the old whip breaks off in brittle chunks. Then the vet is checked out and the new blood trickles in. The young phenom gets his chance to chase the cherry and learn how it feels to be "in there" day after day.

Strictly speaking, there's mighty few real phenoms. The average kid they call that is greener than spring grass or Irish bunting, and probably just happens to have been lucky enough to win a champion outfit of arms and legs from old Lady Nature. Possibly once in a million times, or about as often as you'll run across a town without a bootlegger, a manager bumps into a natural born, knock-'em-dead young marvel.

I guess Bobby Donald didn't know the millionth time was at hand for him when he made the backers of the Cascade City club in the Northern Pacific loop kick

through with enough lettuce to train a team in California. He wasn't fretting much about phenoms at the time he rolled south. It ain't usual for a second-class aggregation to get in shape a thousand miles from home, but Bobby wanted to escape the rain, and was well pleased to think he'd been able to do so.

Tommy Vane, Steve Carlson, Hap O'Connor, and yours modestly were among the first to show up for the grind, although we were all old regulars. For his training camp Bobby Donald had picked out a village called Sprockett, a few miles out of San Francisco. The place was recommended by a Coast League pilot who finished in the cellar the season previous; and he had it coming to him for recommending Sprockett.

The one respectable hotel was so jammed with birds laboring in a local sugar refinery that we had to sleep in tents, which were placed where we had no trouble in hearing the thousand trains that rushed into San Francisco every night clatter by. We were also doomed to face the chow three times daily in the hotel dining room, and that made even Pitcher Gord Malley, the heaviest-eating ball-player I've ever known, lose his appetite until two helpings of everything was plenty for him.

Outside of these little trifles, and the fact that the ball grounds was harder on the dogs than cement, Sprockett wasn't so bad. When we started to crab, Bobby Donald would yodel something about the glorious sunshine, and that seemed to end the argument.

None of the rookies set the earth to blazing the first week or so, although we appeared to have picked up a fair chucker in George Abbott, and a nice hitter in Blondy Berg, one of them fork-handed first basemen. The club needed another good gardener to roam the suburbs along with

Tommy Vane and Gene Gamble, and none of the three or four young cookies trapping hoists seemed to have the necessary class.

"I need another outfielder worse than a traveling man's wife needs consolation," sighs our managerial genius; "but you can't go out and pick 'em like pansies. I got a couple o' kids comin' from Arizona, an' one of 'em may fill the bill."

"Perhaps you could turn this fellow Berg into an outfielder," suggests Stub Russell, a Cascade City sport writer who had come south with Bobby.

"And leave just as big a hole at first base, huh?" retorts Bobby.

"You couldn't make Blondy into an outfielder unless he was allowed to wear a headguard, anyway," says Hap O'Connor. "Some of these high flies coming down are liable to kill a guy if they hit him on the unprotected skull."

This got a grin out of everybody, as Hap's stuff usually did, though I knew Bobby well enough to see he was worried a bit. I walked back to the hotel with him after practice, and, being old tillicums, we talked things over pretty freely.

The clerk beckoned to Bobby as we entered the lobby.

"A young man is waiting to see you, Mr. Donald," he chirps. "Drove up in a swell automobile a few minutes ago, all by himself, and seems to have come quite a ways. Says he's a ball-player."

"Where is he now?" asks Bobby.

"Right across the lobby." The clerk raises his voice. "Here is Mr. Donald, young man!"

A slender young cooky piles out of his chair and beats it for us. He's only a kid, and not a day over eighteen, I'd bet.

"Well, my boy, you want to see me?"

Bobby looks him over. The youngster was well built, if slender.

"Yes, sir. I'm—I'm a ball-player. I came from Redding to get a try-out."

"You mean you drove yourself?" Bobby inquired, for Redding is many miles north of Sprockett.

"Yes—there's the car outside."

We moved to the door as he pointed out the bus. A fine crock it was, too, despite the dust and dirt.

"Some car you have there," remarks Bobby. "Own it yourself?"

"Y-yes—I mean, I—"

"You what?" Bobby inquires sharp'y.

"Well, Mr. Donald, it's like this," the

boy says uneasily. "It's my car, all right, but my family don't know I'm here."

"Oh, they don't? What's your name, and how old are you?"

"My name is Miller—McKinley Miller. I'm eighteen years old. My—my father is the richest man in Redding, and he doesn't want me to be a ball-player."

"He doesn't?"

"No, but I'm dying to be a professional player. I told him so, and he got awful angry, and said I'd get none of his money if I ever tried such a thing. I said I didn't want any of it, and I ran away. I heard about your team training here, and I thought there might be a chance for me."

"You think you can play ball?" quizzes Bobby. "You are pretty young, my boy."

"Oh, but I've always played every chance I got, and lots of people have told me I could surely make good if I had an opportunity."

"I'm not so sure," muses the manager. "I ought to let your parents know you're here, I suppose. They're probably worrying, and—"

"Please don't do that!" the boy begs, in a panic. "Give me a trial—that's all I ask. If I ain't good enough, I'll go right back; but father wants me to work at things I hate. If I only make good at baseball, I won't have to, you see."

"H-m! What do you play, McKinley? Pitch?"

"No, sir. I like the outfield best."

That decided Bobby.

"Well, my boy, I'll give you a chance. You can turn out with us to-morrow, and I'll see if there's any hope for you."

The kid was so grateful that he nearly cried. Bobby gave him a book of meal tickets and a cot where he could hear the trains go by, and let him meet some of the other athletes.

The big car took the eyes of Gene Gamble and Ed Potter, and they suggested taking a ride with young McKinley. The boy's face fell.

"I would take you fellows," he says, "only I'm out o' gas, and I'm broke. I spent every cent I had getting here, buying gas and oil and meals."

"We'll buy the gas," squawks Gene, and away the trio rolled in the hack.

II

THE following morning young McKinley Miller was in a suit. The kid looked pretty

fair in the old gray uniform. Batting practice was the order of the hour, and Bobby sent the boy in to hit with us regulars.

Smoky Jack Killian was chucking, and the first time McKinley came up he burned over a straight fast one. The kid got on to that whizzer with a wicked cut, and the old olive sailed over the right-field fence on a line.

"By golly, I believe the kid can hit!" chirps Bobby. "He sure picked on that quick one of Jack's!"

Before the morning session ended we all agreed with Donald. Young McKinley socked the apple with vigor and enthusiasm. He was a left-handed stickler, and he had one of the prettiest swings I ever lamped. His whole body just seemed to go naturally into his cut, and them kind of batters ain't any too plentiful.

We featured the afternoon with a regular yannigan brawl, and McKinley Miller played center for the yans. All he did was to smack out three blows and swipe three sacks on Steve Carlson. Not only could he hit, but he could run. He pranced on his puppies even faster than those fleet lads, Gene Gamble and Blondy Berg. He also fielded and threw well.

"I was thinking of letting him hang around a couple o' days and then shipping him home," gargles Bobby; "but I guess not! He's a real ball-player, that kid is! For once I believe I've dug up a real phenom. He came and asked for the job, at that!"

The next afternoon with the yannigans McKinley busted a triple and a single, and pulled off a wonderful catch in center. A handful of Sprockett fans watching us work out gave the kid a cheer, and I noticed a little Jane in the bunch clapping her mitts for him. She sure was a pretty girl, probably sixteen or seventeen years old—just the right age to make a hero out o' McKinley, I thought.

"Who is our fair fan?" I ask one of the railbirds I know.

"That's Alice Hooper. Pretty, ain't she? Wait until she's a year or two older! Quite a fan for a kid, too."

"Gosh, no wonder!" chimes in another. "You ought to see her old man. Dad Hooper is about the biggest baseball bug in Sprockett. He goes crazy over a game, especially if he wants to see one team win very bad. There's one guy on the Sprockett team he always hollers against—Sto-

well. Any time Stowell pitches he's for the opposin' team; and he can make a noise, too."

"Where is he to-day?" I utter, not caring much.

"Oh, he's connected with some business in San Francisco, and he's away for a few weeks on a trip around the State. That's why you don't see him out here. I hope he gets back before you boys leave. I'd just like you to hear old man Hooper rave. He's a card!"

"He must be," I agree politely, although I doubt if the parent is as interesting as the child.

Alice Hooper was out to see each tussle the remainder of the week, and it didn't take young McKinley Miller long to become acquainted with the girl. On the diamond the kid had already earned the title of Speed Miller, and he proved this was a pretty fitting monniker all the way around. Little Alice liked him, too.

Tommy Vane and I were riding around the Sprockett hills in his car one eve, and the girl was with him in the front seat. I leaned back lazily in the seat with Tommy and listened to the kids talk.

"Your family must be rich to give you such a nice machine," she observes.

"Uhuh!" answers Speed.

"They live in Redding, don't they? I've never been in Redding. I want to go some time. I never knew there were any very rich people in Redding. What does your father do?"

"Oh, he does anything that 'll make him money."

"My dad travels for a big house in the city. He has a machine, too—an old, rattly thing. I wish he'd buy a new one like this. He said maybe he'd get one if he had a good trip. He hasn't written mother for quite a while, but I think he's having one. I wish he'd write; but I guess he'll be back pretty soon."

"So your father travels all around the State?" says Speed.

"Yes—he goes almost to Oregon, and down to Los Angeles, sometimes. I hope he gets back before you go away. I'd like him to see you play."

"Have a heart, Miss Hooper, have a heart!" Tommy Vane cuts in.

"Well, I would!" she insists innocently. "What are you going to do with your automobile when you leave here, McKinley? Going to send it home?"

"No—yes—I don't know yet," he responds. "Gee, I nearly hit that dog!"

During the remaining two weeks we spent at Sprockett Alice Hooper had several rides with Speed Miller. They were just two kids who liked each other, and I could see our young outfielder was going to hate to go north.

This he certainly would do. The third outfielding job was his. In fact, Speed was the find of the spring. In the practice games we played at Mare Island, Oakland, and elsewhere, he played the sweetest kind of ball, and Stub Russell sent all kinds of glowing yarns back to Cascade City about our "phenom." It nearly made some of us jealous.

"I'll sell that boy this fall," Bobby Donald chirps. "He'll go up, and we ought to get a nice piece of change out of him, too."

A couple o' nights before we were to leave Sprockett, Speed nearly went on the shelf, however. He was out in his car with Gene Gamble, Lee Kelly, and George Abbott, and some wild goof bumped them in the dark. Speed's machine had to go to a garage for repairs, and the lad skinned one arm pretty bad. Alice Hooper wasn't along, her father being due that night.

"We'll be able to use him Sunday," says Bobby. "Might have broken his arm, though. And we have a tough battle Sunday!"

Our final game in California was to be played in Sprockett, against the Sprockett team. They had a very fast club, with a number of professional stars who are on the sugar company's pay roll.

"This fellow Streak Stowell is to chuck for them to-morrow," Bobby tells us Saturday afternoon. "He's some pitcher. He'd be in the big leagues yet if he'd take care of himself. We'll have a battle beating him, but we got to do it. We want to go north with our last game a win."

"You bet! Got to make the fans think this is some ball club, and pull 'em in opening day," remarks Stub Russell, the sport writer.

Several of us were chewing around in front of the sugar company gym that evening—it being our dressing quarters for practice—when Alice Hooper came by, accompanied by a stout man—undoubtedly her father.

She introduced him to Speed Miller and the rest of the clan.

"I'm going to be out to that game, and I'll yell my head off for you!" Dad Hooper announces. "I never pull for Sprockett with Streak Stowell in the box. I'd give anything to see him beaten—and yet I never have, the last three years."

"Why don't you like Stowell?" I ask him.

"Because I saw him deliberately bean a young fellow two years ago. I knew he did it on purpose. A swell young player, too, and the ball nearly killed him. He's never been any good since."

"It might have been accidental," contends Steve Carlson.

"No—Stowell grinned after he did it. I want you boys to do your best to beat him, and you'll have one rooter out there, too!"

"Don't I count?" pouts little Alice.

Speed Miller was invited to join them in a stroll, and of course the kid accepted. The three trotted off.

"The old boy seems to be sore on Streak, all right," says young Lee Kelly. "Wonder if the fellow really does try to hit batters?"

"Oh, I don't think so," yodels big Steve. "I've been catching for years, and I never handled a pitcher that deliberately tried to hit batters. I've seen a lot of fans that wouldn't believe that, but I know what I think about it."

Most of us were inclined to side in with Steve. It's been my own experience that few hurlers use the bean ball with malice aforethought; but of course I didn't know anything about Streak Stowell, it must be admitted.

"Well, I'll sure be glad to leave Sprockett," comments Ed Potter.

"And go some place where a guy can eat," finishes Gord Malley.

"Eat!" says Steve. "I saw you put away three steaks to-night, Gord. How come you're losing your appetite like that?"

"Well, the last one was a little tough," remarks Gord.

"Tough, nothing!" gargles Hap O'Connor. "Your teeth were just getting tired, that's all. At that, I'll be glad to leave dear old Sprockett. I've been standing around in these hills so long that one foot's getting shorter than the other."

We spoofed back and forth, like a bunch of roughnecks will, and then hit for the old alfalfa. Speed Miller was parked in my

tent, and he got in just as Tommy Vane, Steve, and I went under covers.

"Have a nice walk, McKinley?" Tommy asks sweetly.

Speed growls—something unusual for him.

"Too bad the bus is smashed up and you can't take her out riding," blabs Tommy.

"Oh, shut up! Can't you leave me alone?" Speed squawks angrily.

"All right, my good-natured young friend! I'm through," says Vane.

I grinned in the dark and nudged Steve.

"The kids must have quarreled," I whisper.

"Maybe the old man got heavy," Steve comes back. "Some one was telling the clerk to-day, I remember, that he had a bit of tough luck on this trip."

Neither one of us was right. Twenty-four hours later—but that would be playing the ninth inning ahead of time.

III

SPROCKETT turned out in good shape for that brawl, filling the small grand stand and bleachers. Alice Hooper and her father were among those present. The girl waved and smiled at Speed, and not a thing in the world seemed wrong. The old man was cordial, too, before the battle; yet the boy appeared to be nervous and uneasy, and unusually silent.

Smoky Jack Killian was delivering 'em for us, and the noted Streak Stowell was announced as the Sprockett chucking choice. Bobby was using Speed in right field, as that was to be his regular garden.

We got nothing in the opening canto. Stowell struck out two, including our young outfield phenom, who was leading off for us.

Sprockett gave the home guards something to shout over when they put across a pair in their half. Jack Killian was wilder than a mountain goat, and issued three passes. Mixed with a scratch blow and Lee Kelly's boot, this presented the foe with their tallies and left the cushions full. Then Jack got sore and whiffed three birds in a row.

Alice Hooper's father was sure a fan. He was yelling his head off for us, but we weren't able to damage Streak Stowell much until the third stanza. With one away, young Speed dropped a beautiful bunt down the third base line and beat it

out. He swiped second, and then Bobby Donald knocked a slow grounder down to short. A swell peg nailed our leader at first; but Speed, having a long lead off second, never checked himself at third. He continued on for the plate and scored by a sweet slide. Stowell howled over this decision, but it didn't do him any good.

Our enthusiastic supporter, Mr. Hooper, made himself heard, and Alice wasn't by any means silent.

"That boy's a ball-player," says Hap O'Connor seriously.

"Say, I'll bet that fellow over there in the stand is a scout or something, watching him."

Lee Kelly points out a heavy-set cracker with a derby hat, sitting by himself in the bleachers.

"Scouts in spring?" Hap O'Connor grins. "Only the boy scouts are out this time of year!"

"I don't know," Steve Carlson puts in. "That looks something like Del Donegan, who usta pick 'em for New York."

Gene Gamble struck out, and we had to take the field, so the discussion was dropped for a while.

The combat hustled along into the last of the fifth, when Sprockett fell on Killian's fast ball for two solid doubles and another marker. Only a great catch by Gene Gamble, and Lee Kelly's one-hand stop, saved further trouble. Bobby Donald warmed up Silent Shepherd, our slow-ball artist, to go in the last four frames, figuring a change would do no harm.

Streak Stowell had been going good, and mowing us down in order. Miller was the first hitter to face him in the sixth, and he must have grooved one for the boy. At any rate, Speed crashed it far over the starboard barricade, and we were just one run behind. More cheers from the Hooper family!

Bobby Donald follows with a double, and Gene Gamble beat out a bunt. Nobody gone, it looked tough for Streak, and I could hear Hooper howling:

"There he goes! There he goes! You'll be streaking out o' the box in a minute now!"

But Stowell stayed. He settled down, and showed us some heaving we hadn't encountered all spring. He fanned Blondy Berg, made Steve Carlson pop up, and set me down on three wicked hooks that had me swinging like a loose gate.

In the seventh we went after him again, and had the bags crammed with one out, through a pass to Tommy Vane and hits by Silent and Speed. How that kid was cocking the olive! But once again Stowell stopped us dead, getting Bobby Donald and Gamble on short flies to the infield.

In the eighth canto he was pushing 'em past in great shape, and we never smelled first. Meanwhile Shepherd had Sprockett clouters on his hip with that teasing lob of his.

We started the ninth full of determination. We needed one run, and we sure craved a couple of base knocks.

"Let's go out and get this fellow now!" encourages Bobby Donald. "We can beat him this inning. Make him put you on, Tommy!"

Tommy Vane has an eye like an eagle, and he managed to coax another Weston out of Stowell. Lee Kelly laid one down and put him on second with one in the grave. Ed Potter was chased in to swat for Shepherd, and smeared a liner into the second sacker's mitts. Tommy was nearly doubled on the drive.

Speed Miller was up.

"You can do it, boy!" shouts Bobby.

"Oh, you Miller!" from old man Hooper.

"Hit it, McKinley, hit it!" Alice was talking.

Streak Stowell wound up and shot the onion right at the boy's head. He tumbled in the dirt, but was up in a flash. Again the Sprockett pitcher coiled his arm and let the ball go at Speed's cranium. Only a lightning spill saved the boy. Stowell looked to be deliberately trying to hit him.

"That's enough of that, you big cheese!" squawks Ed Potter. "You bean him, and I'll get you!"

Alice's father was raving.

"You big bum! You coward! Ye'llow Streak Stowell ought to be your name! Can't you pitch like a man?"

Gritting his teeth, Stowell burned the apple in. Speed clicked it on a line over short, and Tommy Vane tore for the plate. The peg was made from center, but Tommy was too fast. The catcher hadn't a chance to tag him, so he whipped the ball to second, to head off the fleet Miller. His throw was a little low, with the result that Speed stopped at third, breathing hard. The count was knotted, and a runner perched on third, with two succumbed.

Badly peeved, Stowell worked hard with Bobby Donald. He forced our manager to foul one and handed him two balls. He kicked about the corners a lot, too.

On the next chuck Speed, leading well off the bag, suddenly scooted for the plate. He made a wonderful sprint and topped it off with a hook slide that seemed to bring him safely over. When the umpire spread out both hands we all yelled and jumped, and I guess the Hoopers went crazy.

"A clean steal of home!" says Stub Russell, who was on the bench with us. "It puts us in the lead!"

"Boy, you certainly are the hero of this game!" yodels Hap O'Connor. "You can have as much to eat to-night as Gord Malley!"

The dusty kid said nothing, and when Bobby Donald grounded out we took the field for the last half of the ninth. George Abbott chucked this chapter for us, and his wide curve baffled Sprockett. Not a cooky saw first, and the brawl was ours, four to three.

IV

Old man Hooper ran out on the field to congratulate us.

"You beat that yellow pup at last!" he says. "Nothing ever tickled me so much in my life. I won a nice bunch of berries on you, too. All of you played nice ball—but Speed Miller! Boy, you're a wonder! You'll be another Ty Cobb some day. I wish I could do something to show how I appreciate your playing."

Speed looked awful funny for a second, but only mumbled some word of thanks.

"McKinley, you were simply marvelous," Alice Hooper finds an opportunity to say, and I guess that tickled the kid.

We sang and had a good time in the showers at the gym. Speed Miller, Bobby Donald, and yours not so heroically struck the street together. A man was waiting outside.

I recognized him. It was the fellow Lee Kelly took for a scout—the derby-hatted bird with the cigar. He stepped toward Speed.

"Your name McKinley Miller?"

"Y-yes," falters the boy.

"Well, you've certainly led me a merry chase!" this guy growls. "I got a warrant for your arrest, charging you with stealing an automobile at Dunsmuir, California, on the night of March 30, this year. I've

seen the car in a garage here, and it's the missing bus, all right. Don't deny it, do you?"

"No." Speed's head droops. "I—I took the car. You are an officer?"

"Yep—Atherman Agency. Pretty serious offense, stealing a car!"

"Would you mind telling me just what all this means?" Bobby Donald asks gravely.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Donald." Speed looks it, too. "I was crazy to get a job playing ball, like I said. I'd just lost my job in a garage in Dunsmuir, and only had four or five bucks. I made up my mind I'd come here. I had a chance to grab the car, and I took it. I know I was foolish, but I was desperate, too."

"And your rich father at Redding—that story ain't true, of course?" Bobby gently inquires.

"Oh, my folks live at Redding, all right; only my father ain't rich. He never did want me to play ball, though, and I ran away from home three or four months ago. I had to explain the car somehow, so I told the first story that came into my head."

Stub Russell had joined us, and was listening silently. Bobby spoke again.

"What were you going to do with the car when we left?"

That had been one of Alice Hooper's queries.

"I didn't know. I wanted to return it, but couldn't figure out any way. I was so afraid of being caught and not getting to play ball any more."

"Will the owner press this charge, officer?" Bobby wants to know.

"I'm afraid he will, mister. He was very sore when he set us on the track. He just bought the boat, you see. He's a traveling man, and he'd traded in an old rattletrap and a lot o' dough for a new machine, and then it was swiped from him. He raved to me a week ago. Maybe you can talk to him, though. He lives in this town. Name is—lemme see—Hooper, John Hooper. I'm goin' to look him up, and—"

"Old man Hooper!" I exclaim.

"That nutty fan!" adds Stub. "He—he comes now!"

Sure enough, our loyal rooter was bearing right down on us. Alice wasn't with him. He stopped in surprise as he saw the detective.

"What's happened, Mr. Burnham?" he gargles.

"Located your car and the guy who stole it. The bus is in a garage, and this ball-player, Miller, is the one who hooked her."

"You got my car, Speed?" demands Hooper.

"Yes, sir." Briefly the boy retells his story. "I didn't know who owned the car when I took it," he winds up; "but last night, when we were all walking together, and you spoke of the loss of a new car at Dunsmuir, I guessed it was yours. I was almost sick over it. I intended to confess it all after the game, and return the machine. I'm afraid I waited too long."

Hooper looks steadily at the kid.

"Not in the habit of stealing cars, are you?"

"No, sir, I—" Speed chokes a bit. "I just wanted to get here and play ball."

Alice's father regarded him seriously for a moment, and then suddenly smiled.

"Boy, after what you pulled off this afternoon, I'd almost be willing to lose a car. However, my machine is here, and O. K. If things hadn't happened as they did, you wouldn't have been here to beat Streak Stowell and give me the game of my life. I told you I wished I could show you how I appreciated your playing, didn't I? All right—I appreciate it enough to drop all charges against you. I'll pay your bill, officer, and let that end the affair."

"You're doing it," opines the dick. "I think he's a pretty swell ball-player for a kid, myself; so I'm satisfied, if you are."

Speed is nearly crying.

"Mr. Hooper, I—I am ashamed. And Alice—"

"Alice ain't going to know a thing. Maybe it'll be awkward explaining how I got the car from you, but leave that to a traveling man!"

He insisted on walking to the garage with Speed to get the hack. Bobby Donald draws a deep breath.

"Well, I was pretty close to losing the best kid ball-player I ever picked up in my life!" he expresses. "I'm glad he chose Hooper's car, anyhow. Think of him stealing an automobile to play ball!"

"I don't know. It's like that winning run to-day—a pretty clean steal, I call it," observes Stub Russell. "I guess he won't be trying to steal anything the rest of his life but bases—and that's all right!"

Blind Justice*

A STORY OF CRIME, PUNISHMENT, AND MERCY

By Frank R. Adams

Author of "Five Fridays," "No Experience Required," etc.

XIV

"WHY did the deceased ask for policemen to arrest your father?" demanded the coroner, stepping unerringly on the weak point in Saidee's story.

The girl thought swiftly. There were several explanations that she might have offered, but instinct told her that they would not stand the test of searching investigation and subsequent cross-examination by legal authorities. It must have been instinct, because she had no previous experience to guide her. The same instinct prompted her not to make any statement about anything she did not surely know.

"I can't explain it," she said.

"You mean you won't?" suggested the coroner.

Saidee let that pass, and preserved a safe and discreet silence. The coroner battled with the stone wall of her eyes and then said:

"Proceed."

Saidee went on with an expurgated account of her conversation with the Lieutenant Governor. Finally she reached the point in her narrative where the masked stranger stepped into the room. This was something new. Every one in the room leaned forward expectantly.

"What's that?" the coroner demanded.

"A man wearing a handkerchief over his features stepped into the room."

"You mean your father entered that way?" asked the coroner.

"It was not my father."

"How do you know? You say his face was muffled with a handkerchief."

"I am certain that it was not my father. This gentleman had on evening clothes, and my father doesn't own such things.

Besides, this man was taller and stronger. He was able to hold Mr. McNab in his grip while I got away from the room, and Mr. McNab was a strong man."

"While you got away from the room?" echoed the coroner.

"Yes—I climbed out through the window, swung by my hands from the balcony, and ran home."

"Leaving your father to kill the Lieutenant Governor?"

"No. To the best of my knowledge and belief, he was downstairs in the drawing room, waiting for me; but in the stress of excitement I forgot that he was there and ran home blindly."

"H-m!" the coroner mused, mentally going back through the story she had told. "If this masked stranger was not your father, who was he?"

"I don't know."

"H-m! You don't know why the Lieutenant Governor telephoned the police, and you don't know who the masked man was who stepped through the window! The fact that the Lieutenant Governor telephoned to the police for help shows that he was aware of a contemplated attack. Furthermore, he described your father as a man from whom he feared assault; and yet you say you know nothing about it. In other words, you say you don't know anything about the assault your father had planned."

"I am positive that my father had no plans against Lieutenant Governor McNab. He didn't even know him. My father has no plans against any one. He's not that kind of a man," Saidee finished brokenly.

A glance out of the corner of her eye had caught the supplicating gesture which her father had involuntarily made toward

* Copyright, 1922, by Frank R. Adams—This story began in the February number of *MURSEY'S MAGAZINE*

her. She wanted to go to him, to caress and console the poor old man who had been both a father and mother to her.

To what heights he had climbed under the spur of a call for help from her! Neither Saidee nor any one else would have dreamed that Reeve McCall could have summoned the decision of character actually to break into a room and put himself in physical opposition to another man. Suddenly she realized how much she meant to her daddy. For her he had risen superior to his weakness. In return for that, what sacrifice could she make for him that would be too great?

The coroner was unable to shake the girl's adherence to her story, and finally dismissed her, impressed by her personality, but almost openly sneering at her testimony. He recalled Quarles to the stand.

"Mr. Quarles," he asked, "did your master keep anything of any particular value in the library?"

"Nothing that I know of, sir. There are a great many valuable bits of bric-a-brac throughout the house, but nothing in one place more than another."

"Where is the safe?"

"In Mr. McNab's bedroom."

"Has it been tampered with?"

"No, sir."

"Are there any valuables of any sort missing from the house?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did you see anything of this burglar, or housebreaker, whom Miss McCall describes as having entered by the library window?"

"I did not."

"That is all, thank you."

The police surgeon took the stand. He testified that Lieutenant Governor McNab had met his death from concussion of the brain, caused by a blow from some heavy object which had fractured the skull.

The coroner now addressed the jury. After the conventional instructions, he said:

"It will be necessary for you, gentlemen, to consider Miss McCall's account of this masked stranger who appeared so opportunely through the window. I wish to call your attention, however, to the fact that, so far as we have any evidence, there is no one who would have had any reason for entering that room at that time. Also, there is no one else who, so far as we know, would have had any motive in attacking Lieutenant Governor McNab. You should

also consider the fact that loyalty to her father might prevent Miss McCall from giving evidence which might implicate him.

"It is, of course, not my duty to defend or convict any one of this monstrous crime against a public official. All that I can do, gentlemen, is to point out to you the salient features of the case, so that in your deliberations you will not overlook them. Therefore I suggest to you that you should weigh well this testimony about the masked stranger. Assuming for the sake of argument that such a person actually appeared at exactly the right moment, it is necessary to ask ourselves who he might be, why he came, and, having stumbled upon the situation which existed at his entrance into the room, why he deliberately killed the Lieutenant Governor of the State.

"In thinking over these three questions, notice that if we are to suppose that the intruder was a housebreaker, he behaved in a very curious way. In the first place, he came into a house through the window of a room which was brilliantly lighted, and in which there were people moving and talking. Note, secondly, that there has been no mention of anything having been stolen from the house. This, of course, is not conclusive evidence that the masked stranger, if he really existed, was not a thief. Obviously, he would have had very little time after the commission of the major crime to take away any spoil before the arrival of the guardians of the law. Note further—and this I must point out with regret—that the existence of this masked intruder must be admitted in order to establish the innocence of Reeve McCall. No one saw him except Mr. McCall's daughter, who, from a perfectly natural instinct of family loyalty, would presumably wish to save her father from the consequences of a capital crime.

"Unless there are some questions, gentlemen, I will now ask you to retire and bring in your verdict."

The jurymen were out ten minutes. On their return, the foreman addressed the coroner.

"This jury has agreed that the deceased was willfully murdered, and recommends that Reeve McCall be held over to the grand jury for trial."

XV

PHILIP LOGAN was at Saidee's side as soon as the inquest was dissolved. The

girl seemed stunned, uncomprehending; but even in her own trouble, she thought of him.

"You had better keep away from me," she said.

"Why?"

"Because my father is about to be tried for murder."

"You don't think he did it, though?"

"I know he didn't," Saidee declared positively.

"Then you surely would not dismiss me from your side just when you need me most?"

"But there are other reasons," Saidee deplored.

"Unless you explain these mysterious other reasons, you can't expect me to pay any attention to them," Philip argued. "No, you have to have me hanging around whether you want me or not. Now go and tell your father not to worry, and assure him that everything will be done to clear him. When you have seen him, come to me, and I will take you somewhere to eat. There is nothing quite so necessary in time of trouble as nourishing food."

This was a masculine argument, but Saidee had no available rebuttal. After all, it was rather nice to have some one to boss her, and it would be dreadfully lonely to return to the apartment all by herself and dine listlessly, if she ate at all, on cold, dispiriting left-overs.

Saidee found her father panic-stricken. His courage had not rebounded from the blow of the verdict. He clung to her pathetically, absurdly avid for her words of promise that all would be well.

Saidee felt almost a criminal in promising. She feared that she was powerless to perform the prodigies she prophesied; but she could not withhold the cheerful lies, if they were lies, because her trembling father had need of their stimulus.

Their positions were strangely reversed. She felt that she was a parent, while he was a child clinging to her for support, needing her assurance that everything would come out all right.

She left him with a burden on her young shoulders that was to grow heavier and heavier as the days went by. It could never be transferred to any one else. Philip, eager as he was to help, could at best be only an adviser. Her father's life depended upon her efforts, upon her resolution, determination, and cleverness. She

swore to herself that she would not fail him.

Absorbed in her resolution, Saidee allowed herself to be led to a quiet café. Philip ordered a man's kind of a dinner—steak and potatoes, with coffee and pie for a finish. Saidee ate it without knowing what it was; but she ate it, nevertheless, and was temporarily reinforced to face the world.

"I suppose," Philip said slowly, after they had finished their coffee, "that your story about the masked stranger is perfectly true?"

Saidee eyed him to see if he was making fun of her. He was not.

"I know it sounds like something I invented," she confessed; "but it actually happened so."

"And do you believe that it was he who killed McNab?"

"It would seem so, don't you think?"

"That being the case," summed up Philip, "all we have to do is to find the masked stranger."

Saidee laughed hopelessly.

"Can't you see how difficult that's going to be? I don't remember a single thing about his appearance. His clothes were just like those of any man in evening dress, and his features were entirely concealed with a handkerchief. I don't see how we can ever find him. Besides, if he killed Mr. McNab, the chances are that he's either well hidden, or a long way from here. With no more description of him than I can give, the police would have tremendously little to go by, even if they believe my story—which I don't think they will."

"That is the problem." Philip knitted his brows. "I presume it will be as well to start with a private detective right off the reel. To get a good detective and a first-class lawyer to conduct your father's defense is all that we can do immediately. The case will not be up for a month or so, and we have plenty of time."

XVI

THE trial of Reeve McCall was very much like all murder trials. Perhaps it was a little more expeditiously conducted, because of the prominence of the victim; but in its essence it conformed strictly to the regular newspaper sensation.

To Saidee it seemed as if an irresistible current, a menacing evil force, was drag-

ging her and her father to the edge of a precipice over which they must inevitably be hurled.

The private detective whom Saidee, at Philip Logan's suggestion, had hired, turned in a tremendous expense account, but contributed practically nothing toward Reeve McCall's defense. Saidee had had a wild hope that some miracle of deduction would be performed by the investigator, some almost superhuman piece of reasoning that would follow clues not visible to the lay mind. He proved, however, to be merely a clever policeman, highly trained in remembering faces and an indefatigable sifter of details, but not an inspired genius by any means when it came to finding clues in thin air.

Saidee felt that the detective did not believe her story—and, had he been forced to confess the truth, that was probably the case. It sounded too preposterous, too imaginative altogether, for a prosaic sort of mind accustomed to dealing with the conventional motives for crime. Why should a burglar enter a room in which a quarrel was going on and then depart without taking anything?

The detective had honestly tried to make something out of this yarn. Somewhat belatedly he had attempted to get fingerprints from the window sill over which Saidee claimed her rescuer had climbed; but the place had been tidied up by the servants, and no significant marks could be found. The snow which had been on the ground beneath the window had melted and drained away, so that there was not a sign of a footprint to prove that any one had ever been there. The detective's results were so worthless that Reeve McCall's attorney declined to put him on the stand at all.

Saidee got little encouragement from the attorney himself. It was quite true that he talked confidently, but she felt that it was the bedside manner of the despairing physician. He didn't convince her that he had much hope of winning.

Public sympathy was against Reeve McCall. By snap judgment he had been placed in the ranks of the anarchists. He was catalogued as a fanatic and a menace to public safety. Even if people were sorry for him, they considered him better out of the way.

The recital to the court of the Lieutenant Governor's treatment of Saidee before

his death acted as a boomerang. The prosecution turned this to its own account by claiming that it was a framed-up attempt to cast a slur upon the character of the deceased public official. The attorney drew parallels with many famous Americans who in their time were victims of slander and scandal. The idea caught the public's fancy, and people began to wonder if they had not lost a great man in the death of their Lieutenant Governor.

Saidee cried bitterly, when she was alone, over the unjustice of it all. The clockwork which McNab had set going before his death had relentlessly ticked on, and was now about to destroy them. To struggle against it was like beating upon an iron door with bare fists.

The final blow in the flood of untoward circumstances came when she was placed upon the witness stand for cross-examination by the prosecuting attorney. Instead of asking her to recount what happened previous to the murder, as she had expected, he said abruptly:

"Miss McCall, when did you first meet Mr. McNab?"

Saidee hesitated for a fraction of a second.

"I met the Lieutenant Governor on the night of the murder," she replied firmly.

"I didn't ask you when you met the Lieutenant Governor," the prosecutor insisted. "My question was, when did you first meet William McNab?"

"And I repeat on the night that he was killed."

"That will do," the prosecuting attorney said courteously, as she stepped down from the witness stand.

He requested that his next witness should be called, and a captain of police took the stand.

"Captain Collins," inquired the prosecuting attorney, "when did you first see the prisoner?"

"On the night that we raided his flat to arrest the Cline brothers, after the Greenwood Bank robbery, in 1909," Captain Collins replied without hesitation.

"Were you in charge of that raid?"

"No—I was a patrolman at that time."

"Who had command of your detail?"

"William McNab, who was then a detective sergeant."

"Was there any one else present at the time this raid was made besides the prisoner and the Cline brothers?"

"Yes, the prisoner's daughter was there also. She was a little girl in short skirts at that time."

"Was there any reason why she should not have seen McNab at that time?"

"No, sir."

"On the night you speak of, was the prisoner arrested along with the Cline brothers?"

Captain Collins grinned reminiscently.

"There were no arrests made, sir, that night."

"How was that?"

"If you remember, sir, William McNab shot and killed Swing Cline for resisting an officer, and Steve Cline got away."

"How about McCall and his daughter?"

"I was in charge of them, sir, and I thought I had them handcuffed; but one of them hit me over the head and knocked me out, so they got away."

That was all, but it was damning. The prosecutor, in his summing-up speech to the jury, pointed out that Saidee had lied about not knowing McNab, and argued that that lie vitiated her whole testimony. Captain Collins's story also established the fact that Reeve McCall had been an associate of criminals in the past, and that this was not his first act of violence, if it was he who knocked out Officer Collins on the night of the death of Swing Cline.

The revelation of McCall's past further accounted for the fact that Lieutenant Governor McNab had feared the old man as a dangerous character, and suggested an additional motive for his seeking out the Lieutenant Governor in a spirit of revenge. It even removed the sinister cast from the fact that McNab had held Saidee a prisoner in a locked room pending the arrival of the police.

The only evidence in McCall's favor, the prosecutor pointed out, was the story of the masked stranger. This rested entirely on the testimony of Saidee McCall, who in the first place was an interested witness, and in the second had proven herself to be a liar under oath. As evidence, therefore, this highly improbable tale was practically negligible.

The jury pronounced the prisoner guilty, and the judge set the day for the execution.

Saidee had seen it coming for some time, and was anesthetized against it by despair; but her father did not comprehend that every effort had failed. He had been hoping all the time, trusting to the fact that

he knew he was innocent and to the faith that Saidee had inspired in him. Now, when the blow fell, he collapsed, went all to pieces, and had to be taken from the court-room in a dead faint.

Saidee went to him in the adjoining room, followed by Philip, who had been her constant shadow during the trial. She held the shoulders of her thin and wasted father in her arms. She seemed more than ever like his mother. She had the feeling that makes a woman eager to take her son's place and suffer for him.

She was crying, but when he showed signs of regaining consciousness she wiped her eyes hastily and forced a smile.

"There, there, daddy!" she was saying.

"You're feeling better now, aren't you?"

His eyes had opened, tranquil, calm. He even smiled a little at seeing his daughter; but all at once his expression chilled with horror.

"I heard the judge say—"

"There, there, let's not talk about it!"

"But they said I was guilty of murder," he insisted. "They said I was going to be—executed!"

"But that's simply the form, daddy. Just because the judge said so, it doesn't necessarily mean anything."

"Don't you think they will do it?" he said, carefully avoiding the more dreadful words.

"No, no, of course not," she assured him, and was rewarded by the pitiful rebirth of hope in his eyes. "Your lawyer is going to ask for another trial; and even if we lose that, we can always ask the Governor to pardon you."

"Do you think he would do it?" the old man asked, despair returning to his eyes.

"I am sure he would," said Saidee.

"But how can you know?" her father pleaded childishly.

"I don't know, of course," Saidee answered; "but Philip Logan, the Governor's son, thinks so, too—don't you, Philip?"

She threw a pleading look at her lover, an unspoken appeal to lie for the sake of her father's sanity, to tell the pleasant untruth that would ease his pain.

"I am quite sure," said Philip in response, "that my father will be very glad to listen to any appeal which your daughter may make to him."

He had answered without committing himself.

It was a terrible interview for Saidee.

She was almost a wreck when Philip took her away. He knew that the court would not allow the motion for a new trial, but he didn't tell her so that day. He thought she had all that she could bear.

XVII

NEARLY everybody in this world has some one upon whom he can lay his burdens, to whom he can trust his troubles, if only for a little while, in order to gain strength to carry on; but Saidee was singularly alone. The friends whom she had made socially withdrew from her. Not all of them cut her directly, but she sensed that they went out of their way to avoid meeting her, and she found herself in a bitter Coventry.

At times the unfairness of it overwhelmed her. Yesterday the world had showered her with favors, people had sought her out and tried to woo her; but now, through a series of happenings over which she had no control, she was an outcast, an object of suspicion. And yet she was the same girl, unchanged in every particular, just as pretty, just as charming and cultured, as she had been before.

The social fabric, she concluded, is built upon too tenuous a basis. Never again would she trust herself to so frail a craft. "Every man for himself" would hereafter be her motto. Indeed, Saidee was in a fair way to become an enemy to society.

Of course, this was only on her worst days, and in the depths of her own soul. Outwardly—to her father, especially—she never despaired, never complained.

It was perfectly true that Philip Logan was steadfastly her friend. Absolutely refusing to consider the idea of breaking their engagement, he tried to be her constant companion, tried to combine in himself sweetheart, friend, and family.

But it was impossible for her to shift her burdens to him. In the first place, she could not tell him the entire truth. He was not of her caste. He knew nothing of the code that exists among lawbreakers. Never having been in danger of the law himself, he couldn't possibly understand or sympathize with the predicament of those who regard man-made ordinances as something merely to be evaded.

There was only one person in all the world to whom she could have confided the workings of her mind, only one whose thought was certain to be in accord with

her own. She was almost bitter, at times, because he was not there. She felt sure that in some way he could pull them out of this desperate situation.

Perhaps Saidee's opinion of Steve Cline was colored by a survival of childish hero worship, but she felt toward him as no human being has a right to feel except toward his deity. Dogs have that faith in their masters, but people are seldom so trustful toward one another.

Steve Cline was far out of reach. In answer to a guarded inquiry, Philip Logan had disclosed the fact that John Swift was in South America. Philip had planned to see his friend off on the day following McNab's death and his father's stroke, but in the press of events, and in his desire to help Saidee through her gehenna, he had failed to be at the dock at sailing time. A brief and hasty note from John himself, written at the pier, had been his friend's only farewell.

It was an adverse fate that had taken Steve away at a time when Saidee needed him so terribly. He knew all about her home and the conditions which had surrounded her childhood. He would understand the complexities of her mind, which was torn between the warped code of her early associates and the superimposed fabric of ethics which her later training had put on like a veneer.

Yes, Saidee was absolutely alone. Behind her cowered her father, a shrinking, sensitive soul. In front and around, like a circle of ravening beasts, was all of society—judges, lawyers, the police, men and women in every walk of life—all arrayed against her. No matter how kindly and generous they might be among themselves, the front they presented toward Saidee was scowling, menacing. Wherever she turned, looking for a loophole, she was met by the same inscrutable blank wall of disapproval and menace.

It is a fearful thing to find yourself on the other side of the fence, set aside for punishment. Some few of your fellows may give you a glance of compassion, but even that will be tempered with thankfulness that they are not in your shoes. As for the rest, never having known the scourge themselves, they only ply the whip more harshly in response to your pleas for mercy.

The motion of Reeve McCall's attorney for a new trial was denied. Saidee's only

hope seemed to lie in the possibility of securing a pardon or a commutation of sentence from the Governor.

Philip's father had made a remarkably rapid recovery from his stroke, and his indomitable spirit had driven him back to his official duties. There was no denying that his presence was needed. With the Lieutenant Governor dead, there was no one to hold the reins of government in his absence. Most of the routine duties had been attended to by Philip Logan in his capacity of private secretary, but all matters of policy had been held in abeyance pending the chief's return.

Presumably the Governor would have preferred not to see Saidee when she came to interview him. Presumably, also, Philip would have preferred not to burden his father with the problem that she had to present; but Philip loved her, and he begged the Governor to talk to her.

So it was arranged. Saidee came to the Executive Mansion in the evening. It had seemed better to have the interview after office hours.

The Governor received her in his office library, with the kindly dignity of a truly great man toward one with whose sufferings he sympathizes without being able to alleviate them. He was seated behind the barricade of a particularly tremendous carved desk. If he had not been a very large man, the desk would have dwarfed him. As it was, it only made him seem a trifle more inaccessible, more official, and less human.

Saidee, seated on the other side of it, felt that he was out of reach of her personal influence. She knew that whatever she gained from the interview would have to be won by an irrefutable presentation of hard facts.

But she had no hard facts to present. All that she could do was to plead for a tempering of justice.

She sensed, even from the very kindness with which the Governor received her, that she was trying to pierce a stone wall. He was pitying not only her, but the futility of her errand.

There seemed to be no particular point in leading up to the object of her visit circuitously, so Saidee began with a direct attack.

"I heard you say once," she said slowly, "that a Governor who grants a pardon to a condemned man follows the law of God.

Because you said that, I am asking you to exercise your power to spare my father from the penalty which has been inflicted by the courts.

"I realize fully that the judge had no other course than the one that he followed. The law says that certain crimes require certain punishments. A jury has decided that my father is guilty of a crime. Whether or not the verdict of the jury is true, the judge had no alternative. His part was written for him by the laws of the State and of the country; but your position is different. The judge on the bench is answerable to the government, to the people, to the law, but you are responsible to God. You have it in your power to temper the harshness of man-made law with divine mercy.

"You are the only person in all the world who can prevent a terrible mistake from being made. Even if you don't believe my story—and I realize that there is nothing to corroborate it—if you should talk to my father in his cell, you would realize that he is incapable of having committed a murder. He is as tender as a woman, and not at all the stuff from which murderers are made. Members of the jury couldn't be psycho-analysts, but you, a man of thorough training and wide experience of people, must know that actions which are quite possible to one man are an absolute impossibility to another. I know, in spite of every evidence to the contrary, that my father could not have killed Lieutenant Governor McNab.

"Won't you for the sake of your own soul try to find out whether what I say is true, and whether the man who is waiting in the death cell in the State prison is or is not constitutionally capable of murder?"

The Governor had not altered his expression of compassion. He was still sorry for her, but he was not convinced by her arguments.

"My dear Miss McCall," he said, "this is the most difficult thing that I've ever had to do. I will admit that it is much more difficult because I know that my son loves you. If I could honestly find any grounds whatever for commuting your father's sentence, I would do so for your sake, and also for my son's. I realize—as you must, although Philip's mind is blind to it—that this very thing which is happening will be a blight upon his happiness for all time. He really loves you, but you and I know,

don't we, that a marriage under the circumstances would be impossible?"

Saidee nodded her head brokenly.

"Even with the happiness of my own boy at stake, and pitying you from the depths of my heart—"

He shook his head, not finishing the sentence in words.

"They told me you would refuse!" Saidee complained bitterly. Then her despair overcame her self-imposed restraint. "I didn't think that you were so small a man as this!" she railed. "I know that popular sentiment is against my father, and that in the eyes of the press and public his hands are red. The mob would feel cheated if he didn't die, and would turn on the person who robbed them of their spectacle. And you are afraid!"

"Afraid?" The Governor caught her up short in her tirade. "Afraid of what?"

"Afraid that you will not get the votes of the people. Oh, yes, I know that an election is coming, and that you dare not disappoint your constituency. You will sell out a fellow human being in order to protect your own miserable—"

"Poor child!" the Governor interrupted, halting her not so much by the loudness of his voice as by something in his manner.

Saidee's anger subsided at his tone.

"I know as well as you do that there will be an election soon. I know, too, that I am eligible to be chosen again to fill the Governor's chair; but I know something else, and when I tell you what it is you will be the only person in this State to share my knowledge. It is this—I shall not be running for Governor at the next election, nor for any other public office. The doctors told me that I may live for a long time, and I have passed that information along to my family. It is better for them to think so. Under certain favorable conditions I might probably survive for a good many years; but if I carry out my duties to the State during these perilous times through which we are now passing, if I give the force that is in me to my people, as I have sworn to do, it is only by sheer force of will-power that I can carry on until the end of my present term. I think I can force my body to go through until a successor is elected to take my place, but I know that it is going to be my final effort. I don't regret it in the least, and I am not complaining to any one, even

to you. I am telling you this to make you realize that I have said what I have tonight simply because I think it is my duty. With the shadow of death on me as well as on him, I must refuse to pardon your father. Will you who are almost my daughter, because Philip loves you so, try to forgive me?"

Philip, who came in answer to his father's ring, found him with his arm about Saidee's shoulder, supporting her while she cried brokenly upon his breast.

"Take Miss McCall to the train yourself, Philip, as soon as she has sufficiently recovered. Do everything in your power to make her as comfortable as possible."

Saidee didn't say good-by as she was led away from the Governor's office. She was too much overcome by the absolute finality of the Governor's refusal to be able to tell him that she understood and appreciated the sense of duty which had dictated his action.

It seemed as if all hope was gone. The Governor had shown no tendency to relent, even though his heart had been stirred with pity.

And what he had said about her relations with Philip was absolutely true. In spite of his manly protests to the contrary, Philip could not marry a girl whose father had been convicted of murder. She, on the other hand, could never quite reconcile herself to a life with the son of a man who had refused to spare her father from the death penalty.

XVIII

For the next month days and nights had no meaning for Saidee. Time was a ceaseless round of useless endeavor. Occasionally sheer exhaustion overcame her, and she slept; but a nightmare of trying to climb a constantly heightening wall persisted in her dreams, and even sleep left her haggard and worn out.

Feverishly, inspired by the intolerable terror of her father, she tried every expedient that suggested itself to her. She circulated a petition for a pardon, winning over hundreds of people who signed, not because they were convinced that Reeve McCall should be pardoned, but because they could not resist his daughter's urgent pleading.

She spoke before women's clubs, she printed advertisements in the newspapers, desperate appeals to the people and to the

Governor to stop the carrying out of a judicial crime; but it was of no avail. Not a word of response was elicited from the Governor's office. Reporters who broached the subject were silenced, and did not again get admission to the Governor's sessions with the representatives of the press. Letters and petitions to the Governor were politely returned by his secretary.

Time dragged on inexorably. In one aspect the month seemed a lifetime, in another it was a mere snap of the fingers. It was crowded with enough terror and despair to fill an entire existence; and yet, when you sat down and contemplated how little of it was left, it seemed as if the hours had gone like seconds.

Reever McCall was to die on Friday morning.

On Wednesday night his daughter saw him in the death cell. His nerve was completely gone, and if she had not loved him so much she might have been a little scornful of his inability to face his fate. Knowing his character, having been almost a mother to him ever since she was a little girl, and knowing, too, that he was absolutely innocent, she did not have it in her heart to reproach him. On the contrary, she reproached herself because, being so certain that he was guiltless, she could not convince any other soul in all the world of what she knew.

He had not broken and given way to hysteria, as on some previous occasions. That sort of a scene would not have frightened Saidee so much as his dumb silence and the look of haunted terror that she saw in his eyes.

Reever McCall was not ready to die. His daughter felt ashamed to have his soul appear before its Maker in so shabby a state. He seemed to be curiously torpid, and Saidee questioned the guards as to whether morphine had been administered. They said no.

McCall had made a number of pencil marks on the wall of his cell—little vertical straight lines, running in a long row from left to right. Some of those on the left were crossed by a diagonal line. Saidee puzzled over the design for some time, but forbore to ask him any questions.

Then, while she was still there, the clock in a near-by steeple chimed the hour. Methodically, and without saying anything, her father rose from his seat on the edge of his prison cot, took a tiny stub of a pencil

out of his pocket, and drew a short diagonal line through one more of the upright lines.

Saidee had believed herself incapable of any further emotion, but when the significance of his action struck her something of the chilled terror that benumbed her father communicated itself to her. It was only by a tremendous effort of will that she could keep herself from trembling and crying out.

He had said nothing. He had returned to his cot with his eyes averted; but now he lifted them.

What Saidee saw impelled her to rise. To sit idly by and to see him mark off another hour would be unbearable. She must do something!

But there was nothing that she had left undone. Every avenue that she knew of had been tried. Her mind had wearied of searching for corners in which to hide. There was nothing to do but to go over the same futile round, to tread the paths that her feet had worn to no purpose.

Still, she was impelled to action by the thought that in after years she would remember that during her father's last hours she had sat by and let time drag him irresistibly to the death chamber. She crossed to her father's side and put her arm across his shoulder.

"Listen, daddy," she said. "I am going to see the Governor again. I don't know how I can do it, but I will make him give you another chance."

For a second Reever McCall's eyes lit up with a spark of hope, and then the spark died again.

"He wouldn't even see you," he muttered hopelessly.

"Yes, he will," said his daughter. To rise above her own despair and to supply him with courage required a superhuman effort, but she made it. "Will you promise to believe in your daughter?" she asked, patting his shoulder with little encouraging pats, such as a mother might give to her son when sending him off for his first day at school.

Reever McCall took her other hand in his own bony gaunt fingers, and caressed it.

"I'll try, Saidee. I've got to. It's the only thing I have—my faith in you!"

Saidee caught her breath. The weight of her father's faith was a well-nigh intolerable burden, and she staggered for an instant under it.

But she must not fail him—she must not fail him now!

XIX

EARLY the next morning Saidee went to the Executive Mansion, hoping to catch Governor Logan before he had become entangled in the day's business. The servant who took her name returned to say that the Governor was not there.

Saidee's heart sank. What could she do now?

"Not here! Then where is he?" she demanded.

The servant looked importantly wise and mysterious.

"No one is allowed to tell," he returned.

"But I've got to know," said Saidee. "I've got to see him—got to, got to, got to, don't you understand?"

Her voice ended in a sob.

"Here, what's this?" came a friendly speech down the hall.

Philip Logan stepped out from the dining room, where he had been having a belated breakfast.

"It's some woman who says she wants to see the Governor," the servant explained carelessly.

Philip looked at her sharply.

"Saidee!" he exclaimed.

Taking her hand, he led her gently into the Governor's study.

"Why didn't you send your name into me and spare yourself a rebuff from a servant who doesn't understand?"

"I didn't want to see you," Saidee almost whimpered. "I have to see your father."

"What about?" asked Philip kindly.

Saidee clinched her hands until the bones stood out white.

"He must save my father!"

Philip looked at her pityingly.

"Good Heavens, Saidee!" he said.

"You have no idea how I am suffering with you. Dad is almost the same way. He would pardon your father if he could justify himself in doing so. He has said so to me a thousand times. This thing preying upon his mind has made him ill; but he feels that he cannot step in and thwart the law."

Saidee's only reply was a sob. Philip longed to hold her in his arms and comfort her, but he sensed that his sympathy and love would be of little avail.

"Saidee dear," he said, "you know,

don't you, that I would do anything in my power—anything that you could ask of me—to help you in your trouble?"

Saidee looked up with tear-dimmed eyes.

"Then tell me where your father is."

"That wouldn't do any good," he argued. "Father had a slight relapse two days ago. The doctors absolutely forbade him to do any further work for a week or so, and insisted upon taking him away."

"Where?" reiterated Saidee dully.

"To a place out in the woods," Philip confessed against his will. "There is no telegraph or telephone that reaches him, and the doctors have given absolute orders that none of the affairs of the State shall be referred to him. In his absence I am taking charge of everything."

"Then," interjected Saidee hopefully, with a quickening in her voice, "you could sign father's pardon!"

"No, I can't do that. No one can do that but dad. I can prepare the papers, but they wouldn't be any good without his signature at the bottom."

Saidee stood thoughtfully considering this latest reversal of fortune. Her spirit would still not admit of defeat. There must be a way out, a path around!

"What does a pardon look like?" she asked.

"I'll be glad to show you that," responded Philip, relieved to have the conversation turned to a request that he could grant. "I can even show you the pardon that I drew up for your father, on the chance that dad would sign it. It has been lying on his desk for days."

Philip rummaged among the papers stacked in a tray on the Governor's desk, and finally pulled out a document.

"Here it is," he declared, handing it over to her.

Saidee cast her eyes over it quickly down to that painful blank where the signature was not. All that it lacked was one drop of ink sprawled out in the lines of a fellow human being's signature, and it would mean her father's life. How could so simple a thing—a drop of ink—be so hard to obtain?

Some realization of the effort that Philip had made in her behalf came to Saidee when she held in her hand this actual document that her lover had painstakingly prepared. As she looked up at him, her eyes conveyed her thanks.

"You have been a dear," she said.

"I have loved you."

This, when she had time to think of it, was the first time he had ever made that statement so simply and sincerely. His mask of jesting was laid aside. The real man was speaking to her face to face.

With the selfishness of those in grief, Saidee passed by this apple of gold. She would have time, perhaps, to return to pick it up later; but now she was no Atlanta to be diverted from her course, and she drove straight at her goal.

"All that this needs is his signature?"

"That's all."

"Then I must see him!"

Philip shook his head.

"My father is firm. He's doing what he thinks is right, and I believe he would continue to do it even if it killed him."

There was pride in his voice, pride in the steadfastness of his own belief, even though it was mingled with pity for the plight of the girl he loved.

"All the same," Saidee insisted, "I must see him."

"How?"

"I don't know, but there is something inside of me here that forces me on. If you won't tell me where he is, I'll find out some other way."

"You can't," he countered.

"I can!" she said stubbornly. "If you won't tell me, I'll find some one else who knows."

"But the only ones who know are under orders not to tell."

Saidee laughed.

"I'll find out!" she cried. "If necessary I'll trade my soul, or at least my body, for the information."

Her eyes flashed with the fire of her defiance. Philip looked at her pityingly. Her mind must be slightly upset by the fixity of her purpose.

"You have said you loved me," she told him. "Have I put your love to too severe a task at last? I don't blame you, but you repeated a moment ago that you loved me, and I suppose you still do."

"Yes," said Philip, and the truth of his statement shone in his eyes.

"Then I ask you to grant me this one request. Tell me where your father is. I shall never ask another thing of you, and in return I'll devote my entire life to pleasing you. If, as your father says, a marriage between us is impossible, I will still be yours in any way that you wish."

She looked at him without shame in her eyes. Her one great need blotted out all minor considerations of training and feminine instincts.

Fortunately, Philip understood. He took her hand, which was as chilled and lifeless as if dead; for all her energy was concentrated in her brain and in her eyes, which blazed with the intensity of her purpose.

"I understand, dear," he said.

"Will you tell me where he is?"

Philip hesitated just a fraction of a second.

"Yes," he conceded. "Not because of what you offer, however, but because I care more for you than I do even for my father; for I fear that by disobeying orders I may be hurting him beyond repair."

XX

THE Governor had traveled to his hiding place in the woods in a private car. Saidee had no such comfort, but she scarcely noticed the stuffy day coach with its red plush seats, kerosene lamps, and gummy windows.

It seemed as if the train would never get anywhere. It was halted every few miles to unload and take on a noisy complement of passengers, milk, and express. It took two hours to run forty miles, and when she reached her station she was still seven miles from the place where the Governor was isolated.

An automobile stage took her five miles farther on her journey. The last lap was across a lake. She was able to rent a row-boat from an inquisitive native, but she had to furnish her own motive power for the voyage. She was not much of an oarsman, and it was quite three-quarters of an hour before she managed to make the other side.

The splendid isolation of the Governor's camp made it fairly easy to find. There were four or five cabins on that shore of the lake, but only one showed a drift of smoke from its chimney. Saidee headed for that.

The slanting rays of the afternoon sun struck full on the mosquito bar which was tacked up all over the porch. Coming up the path from the lake, she could not see whether there was any one on the porch or not. At the outer door she perceived that the porch itself was vacant. The inner door stood open. She rapped.

There was no answer.

She rapped a second time.

"Is there any one at home?" she shouted.

A voice inside spoke up.

"I can't come to the door, so enter, if you please."

It was Philip's father—Saidee recognized the mellow tones.

She opened the outer door, stepped upon the porch, and went across it to the other door.

For a few moments the comparative darkness inside seemed so black that Saidee could scarcely see any one. Then her eyes, becoming accustomed to it, gradually shifted back into focus. She picked out the homely comforts which were the background for the great dominating figure of the Governor.

Wearing a dressing gown, Governor Logan was seated, as she had almost always seen him, behind a table; but this was not a brilliant dinner table or a heavily carved desk. Instead, it was a plain pine affair, such as one usually sees in a kitchen.

The Governor's occupation was not signing official documents or reading complicated reports. Instead, the few papers and the pen and ink were pushed away from him, and he busied his fingers with a much-thumbed deck of cards, which he was laying out before him for a game of Canfield. It seemed a singularly futile occupation for a man of so much character.

He looked ill—much more so than when she had last seen him. Part of this was due to the fact that he had given up, had loosened his grip, and admitted that he had to be taken care of.

He looked up as she entered. He recognized her silhouette in the frame of the open door, black against the sun.

"When I heard a woman's voice," he said, smiling a little, "I knew it must be you. I admire your courage and spirit, Miss McCall. You have done the well-nigh impossible in tracking me to this place, but I must tell you that your errand is fruitless. If my physician were here, and he will be very shortly, for he has only gone out for some supplies, he would not have allowed you to see me."

"But I should have seen you anyway," Saidee stated.

He looked at her curiously, his sick eyes trying to read the depths of her purpose. Was it madness that made her so persistent, or was she, like himself, firm and un-

yielding of spirit, no matter if the body failed and broke under the strain?

"Why are you so sure?"

"Because I promised my father I would see you and"—she paused—"and bring back his pardon."

The Governor still pitied her, but he was nevertheless amused at her positiveness.

"But I have told you," he said, "that I could not grant your request. Just how do you expect to get my signature? A threat won't do any good. You know that I am not afraid of anything, so that if you have a revolver concealed, you may as well throw it away."

Saidee shook her head.

"I haven't any revolver," she said reproachfully. "I have nothing but a pardon which is all made out ready to sign."

She offered it to him. He smiled.

"Philip's love for you has stood the test, I see," he said. "I fear that were I in his boots I could not resist you, either; but now—"

He shook his head.

"You can't say no!" she half pleaded, half threatened.

"I can. My answer is—"

With his lips parted, his speech broke off abruptly, his jaw dropped, and he sagged back in his chair, inarticulate. In his eyes was the look of haunting terror that she had seen so recently in those of her own father.

She knew what had happened. It was the second of the paralytic strokes.

Having seen him during the first attack, Saidee knew that he could not speak, could not move, and would probably remain in a semiparalyzed condition for several days. Indeed, he might never come out of it.

She did all the little things that she could think of to make him comfortable. Finally, by a supreme effort, he opened his eyes, probably more to let her know that he was alive than because of any real desire to do so.

His glance left hers and fell on the official document which lay on the table. It seemed as if he wanted to say something about the pardon, but of course he could not. With dismay Saidee realized that the hope of getting him to write his name on the pardon had vanished. The Governor would be helpless for days, if not forever, and in twelve hours Reeve McCall would be beyond all help.

Fate had intervened to make it abso-

lutely impossible for her to keep her word to her father. He was sitting alone in that prison cell a hundred miles away, was hanging upon his thread of hope that she could make good her rash promise. There on the table lay the pardon; across the table, slouched in his chair, sat the man whose name affixed to the paper meant her father's life.

And he was powerless to handle a pen. What could be done? How could fate be cheated?

Saidee drew a long breath. She knew the way.

Sitting down at the table, she drew the pardon toward her. The drop of ink was at hand. What matter whose hand spread it on the paper?

While the Governor watched her with curious, talking eyes, she sorted over the papers on the table until she found a letter which he had signed himself. She studied the signature for a moment, and then she held the pen poised in her hand over the blank space on the pardon.

She caught herself up short. What was it she was about to do?

There flashed before her memory the scene outside a railway station one night many years before, when she had promised a tall man, to whom she owed everything in this life, that she would never again copy a signature. She weighed that promise in her mind against her father's life, and threw it out of the balance.

Then, with her eyes on the unblinking ones of the sick man across the table from her, she thought of the wrong she was about to do him. She was going to make him appear to do a thing which was against his principles and his spoken convictions.

She thought, too, of his son, struggling with duties too heavy for him—of Philip, who had loved her, who had trusted her with the secret of his father's retreat. If she forged the Governor's signature on the pardon, she would be betraying Philip Logan's trust.

But she recalled, too, and more vividly, the fear-stricken face of her father. She almost felt the tug of his trembling hands at her skirt. The thought of the consequences to him if she did not seize this opportunity turned her sick.

She wrote rapidly and unfalteringly in the blank space on the pardon. What she wrote was the Governor's signature, exactly as he would have done it himself.

She blotted the ink carefully, and compared her work with the real signature on the letter. It seemed perfect.

In response to what she fancied was a question in the invalid's eyes, she held the pardon up so that he could see it. Then she quoted some well-remembered words that she had heard from the Governor's own lips.

"Who is to say where lies the dividing line between what is right and what is wrong? Every situation creates its own law, which must be obeyed. They say that there is honor even among thieves."

"I did what I have done," she went on, "not so much because I have again become a criminal, but because, being able to do this, I would rather be punished by the State than obey its laws. Whether or not I am obeying a higher law is for God alone to judge. All I know is that I could not have acted in any other way. In my position I believe that you would have done the same thing."

She fancied, perhaps because she wanted to, that she saw approval in the sick man's eyes.

She tucked the document away inside her dress and went about the business of caring for the Governor as well as possible with the things at hand. She did not feel that she was able to carry him into his bed alone; but as he was sitting in a chair with an adjustable back she lowered it as far as possible, and wrapped his limbs in warm blankets.

She was still engaged in her ministrations when the doctor entered. He took in the situation at a glance, and immediately commandeered her services as a nurse. Together, they managed to get the Governor into his bed.

"I don't know who you are," said the doctor, a grizzled, kindly man, "but you seem to know just how to help. War services, I'll wager!"

Saidee nodded.

"Me, too," he explained. "It's lucky you happened to be here. We've got the fight of our lives on, and I don't believe I could have handled it alone. You will stay?"

Saidee thought swiftly. How could she stay, with the pardon pressing against her breast? She must fly to her father's rescue. And yet how could she go, leaving this man whom she had perhaps killed, or at least hastened to his death, by her per-

sistence? She could not shirk her duty either way.

"I'll stay as long as I can," she decided. "Let me go the instant you think it's safe."

The doctor agreed. Together they joined in the struggle against death, fighting it back inch by inch, having it gain all the recovered territory in one swoop, and then holding it once more and with dogged determination driving it back.

Saidee and the kindly-faced old doctor were flushed and dripping with perspiration from the strain of their efforts, but the poor body which lay inert under their hands was as cold as ice. It was dark, and the lamps had long been lighted, when the doctor nodded and said:

"He'll pull through this time!"

Saidee drew a breath that was a sob, the sense of relief was so great. She sat down, dazed, for a second, and rested her head on the table.

As she did so, the crackle of the paper underneath her dress aroused her once more. In the press of the fight she had almost forgotten her major purpose in being there. Spurring her jaded faculties to action once more, she got up and buttoned her jacket about her.

"Now we'll get some supper," suggested the doctor. "You must be famished. I am."

Saidee shook her head.

"I can't wait, doctor. I've got to go back to town."

"Surely you won't go without eating?" he protested.

"I must. I only hope I am not too late now."

"I hate to see you go out alone this dark night; but of course I can't accompany you," he said. "You must tell me your name before you go, so that the Governor can thank you for having saved his life."

Saidee smiled.

"The Governor knows my name already," she said. "If I have saved his life, it only makes us even, and he need never thank me."

XXI

AFTER he had seen Saidee safely started on her journey in search of his father, Philip Logan proceeded thoughtfully to the Governor's office. He wondered how much his actions had been guided, that morning, by a sense of what he thought

was right, and how much by his love for Saidee. He wondered, too, whether he really thought that Reeve McCall was innocent, or if he leaned to that belief simply because Reeve McCall's daughter was constantly in his thoughts as the most attractive and desirable woman in the whole world.

He gave it up. How could he know?

Many times before Philip's problem, the attraction of woman for man had raised havoc with the procedure of the courts. Man-made statutes crumble and break before the universal law.

It was strange, in truth, that Saidee should have presented her demand to him, of all persons. Any other man would have been unmoved by her plea. Had any other woman except Saidee made the same request of him, he would have been able to refuse her, to obey the law, to honor the Governor's commands, and to protect his father's health.

Philip was torn between remorse and the feeling that no matter what the consequences were he could not have done anything different.

He entered his father's office through a side door. An undersecretary came in with the day's mail and a long memorandum of appointments.

"There is a man in the outside office waiting to see you."

"What's his name?"

"Mr. John Swift."

Philip knitted his puzzled brows.

"But Swift is in South America! He wasn't coming back until next year."

"He said that was his name," the secretary insisted.

"Of course it must be John. Show him in right away."

Swift, when he came in, almost ignored the hearty greeting of his friend, so anxious was he to get at the purpose of his visit. He seemed thin and worn. His eyes burned feverishly, and his movements were nervous. His whole bearing was exactly the opposite of his usual calm poise.

"Where is the Governor?" he demanded.

"He's away, under the care of a physician," the son explained.

"I have got to see him."

"You can't," returned Philip. "Do you remember the stroke he had the last time you saw him? Well, the doctor fears a relapse, and we've simply got to protect him. I am taking care of affairs while he's

away. The Lieutenant Governor was killed, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know," Swift interrupted him impatiently. "I saw the papers almost as soon as I landed in Uruguay, and I caught the next boat north bound. The service is rotten since the war, as you may know, and it has taken me all this time to get here."

"You turned right around and came back? Why?"

"To save a friend's life," returned Swift. "That's why I must see your father. Reeve McCall is not guilty of the charge of which he has been convicted, and your father must grant a stay of execution until my testimony can be heard."

Philip deliberated.

"John, do you feel sure that what you have to say to my father will make any difference?"

"I am so sure that I hired a special train from Savannah to get here in time."

Philip was impressed by his earnestness.

"You say you are a friend of Reeve McCall?" he said suspiciously.

"Yes," Swift admitted.

"And you knew Saidee McCall before I introduced you to her that evening at the dinner party?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you pretend not to?"

His friend looked at Philip with mildly reproachful eyes.

"Will it make any difference, Phil," he asked, "if I explain all this later? Right now seconds mean the life of an old man who never did anybody any harm. More than that, they mean the life of a girl whom you love and whom I—well, whom I admire very much."

Philip looked at his friend quizzically.

"You don't have to say 'admire' just to spare my feelings," he said finally. "I knew the truth all the time. This is the way you go to find my father."

And for the second time that morning he disclosed the hiding place of the Governor.

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

LOVE'S TREASURE-TROVE

WHEN the musicians hide away their faces,
And all the petals of the rose are shed,
And snow is drifting through the happy places,
And the last cricket's heart is cold and dead;
Oh, joy, where shall we find thee?
Oh, love, where shall we seek?
For summer is behind thee,
And cold is winter's cheek.

When autumn came through bannered woodlands sighing,
We found a place of moonlight and of tears,
And there, with yellow leaves for it to lie in,
Left love to dream, watched over by the spheres.
It lay like buried treasure
Beneath the winter's cold—
The love beyond all measure,
In heaps and heaps of gold.

Now April comes, with all her sweet adorning,
And all the joys steal back that winter hid;
Shall we not laughing run, some happy morning,
And of our treasure lift the leafy lid?
Again to find it dreaming,
Just as we left it still—
Our treasure far outgleaming
Crocus and daffodil!

Oliver C. Moore

The Darker Brink

THE TERRORS OF A MIGHTY WATERFALL AND THE DEVOTION OF A BRAVE WOMAN

By Kenneth Duane Whipple

BENEATH the gleaming searchlights the thick green sheet of water slanted past, poised for a moment on the brink, and fell away to white spume and wind-blown spray. Long lines of foam from the rapids above ran like snakes over the smooth surface, and seemed to suspend themselves from the aqueous precipice like tenuous ropes. A misty fog, hurled upward from the gigantic rocks below by the mighty impact, enveloped the platform on which they stood, silent before the awful majesty of the great waterfall.

The woman, gripping the rail, leaned forward. Almost below her a sheer emerald wall slid downward smoothly, irresistibly, losing itself in nether darkness. From the depths rose the thunderous crash of tons of water upon the impregnable channel bed of everlasting granite. The violence of the concussion shook the very cliff beneath them, and its roar drowned all other sounds.

She drew back, shuddering. Not all the pictures and descriptions had wrought in her mind an adequate conception of the magnificent reality which now thundered before her, foaming from cliff to echoing cliff; but in its magnificence she could take no pleasure, when drawn there by such an errand as theirs.

Stark terror possessed her as her unwilling eyes again sought the spray-veiled depths. What faith in science could stand serene and unshaken in this overwhelming presence?

Fear clutched at her throat as she convulsively gripped her husband's arm.

"Henry!" she said, trembling.

Her companion inclined his head, and she placed her lips close to his ear.

"Henry, is it—is it too late to—to give it up?"

She was forced to repeat her query before he heard it. A light breeze from the opposite cliff wafted echoing reverberations from the warring elements below. A deeper breath of mist enveloped them. She shrank from its clinging whiteness as from a shroud. Her breath caught in her throat.

"I said—can't you—give it up?"

"Give it up?" the man beside her repeated absently.

She saw that he only half understood. His deep-set eyes—the eyes of a dreamer, a visionary—were fixed unseeingly upon the gulf before them. His determined features were set in lines of high resolve. She could read his thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken.

"To-morrow!" he was thinking. "To-morrow! To-morrow!"

Her fear-haunted eyes followed his abstracted gaze. Through the misty spray opposite she saw dimly a sheer, shimmering battlement, its foot veiled in crashing obscurity. Suddenly there came upon her the illusion that she was moving also—that the very embankment on which they stood was gliding relentlessly into the clamoring void. So real was the sensation that she involuntarily cried aloud, grasping her husband.

He threw his arm about her, and the illusion passed, but its impress of gripping terror remained. Half sobbing, she dragged him to firmer ground.

"Why, Mary, what's the matter?" he asked, roused from his abstraction.

She fought to control a growing hysteria, but it would not be subdued.

"Oh, I'm afraid!" she cried. "I never knew it would be like this! I never imagined it was so awful! Henry! You won't—you can't—"

"But, Mary," protested the man,

"there's no reason for all this foolish fear. You yourself, this afternoon—"

"I didn't mind it so much then, when I first saw it; but it grows on me—it frightens me! And now this evening, to see it come creeping out under the lights—and then it seems to spring like a wild beast! Henry, you won't trust yourself—out there—in the Bullet—you can't—you mustn't! Promise me you won't! Promise me!"

As he looked at her with puzzled eyes she gradually realized the impotence of her appeal. His next words dispelled any lingering hope that he had understood his wife's feeling.

"Why, Mary," he exclaimed at last, "you don't understand! It's just a scientific proposition—absolutely safe—no danger at all. I've figured it all out mathematically—scientific construction, selected material—why, the Bullet's as safe as an excursion boat! Professor Holdsworth's reputation is staked on that, remember. This demonstration shows my faith, not the Bullet's safety. Scientific construction—that's all."

"Scientific construction!" repeated the professor's wife, her voice still uncertain. She raised a trembling hand toward the falls. "When you built the Bullet you had never seen—that! Doesn't it make any difference now that you have?"

"Certainly not," replied the scientist, almost irritably. His voice carried a hurt undertone. "A problem is a problem, not a question of personal feeling. Stresses and strains, impact and velocity, can be computed anywhere—a thousand miles from here, if need be. You don't seem to have much faith in me, Mary, or in my ability. Surely you know me better than that?"

"Oh—faith!" She spoke uncertainly. "Not lack of faith in you, Henry. It isn't that. Oh, I know it's unreasonable, but nothing can endure a plunge like that! How can you stand here and believe it?"

"Others have taken the plunge and lived," he argued stiffly.

They were walking toward the hotel now. To her the roar of the falls behind them was like the snarl of a beast foiled of its prey. She came close to him, and her fingers closed timidly about his.

"Henry, can't you understand? It's you I'm thinking of. It's your safety that I fear for, dear. Your other experiments have sometimes taken you away from me,

but never into useless danger like this. Others may have tried it and succeeded; others have tried it and failed; but none of them was—my husband. Dear, if you love me, give up this foolish plan! I've been urging it all along, but this will perhaps be the last time. Consider me just a little, if you won't consider yourself. Give it up, won't you?"

In the silence before his reply Henry Holdsworth's wife knew herself foredoomed to failure, and a sense of utter despair came over her. Never before since their marriage, in the ten years through which he had abstractedly dreamed his purblind, scientific way, and through which she had unquestioningly followed, loving him with blind loyalty and devotion, had she made such an appeal. Even now she could not believe that he would ignore it.

"I cannot consider myself," Holdsworth was saying. "No scientist has that right."

Thick darkness lay upon the little park through which they were passing. She stumbled once upon a dead branch on the sidewalk.

"Has his wife no rights?" she demanded, after a pause.

"Man and wife are one. Let us argue no more, Mary."

"Then you refuse?"

"Certainly," he said stiffly. "All our plans are made. There is nothing more to be said."

In silence they crossed the street before the small hotel above the falls, which had been chosen as the base of operations. Just below a dim gleam of light marked the spot where the professor's steel-sheathed craft, the Bullet, moored to a pier, awaited the dawn.

As they entered the hotel, Holdsworth shook off his abstraction.

"You had best retire, Mary," he said, noting her haggard countenance. "It is late, and there are still many details to attend to. I must see Foster—he is waiting for me."

Others besides Burton Foster, the scientist's assistant, were awaiting his return. A group of men arose from their chairs as the two entered the room. Turning on the first landing, Mary Holdsworth saw her husband's prematurely bald head the center of an eager circle of reporters and fellow scientists. Holdsworth had compromised his desire to avoid publicity to the extent of granting an interview on the

night before the experiment. Six o'clock the next morning had been set as the hour for casting off; no interruptions of any kind would be tolerated then.

His voice came to her over the heads of the group about him.

"If you want to see me to-morrow, gentlemen," he was saying complacently, "meet me below the falls!"

At her husband's side stood Foster. As she gazed, he turned, and for a moment his eyes met those of the woman on the landing. His glance carried, as always, that tribute of admiration of her mature beauty which she had come to accept from him as a matter of course during his three years as her husband's assistant; but to-night it seemed also to question her, to extend to her sympathy, understanding, and a proffer of aid.

With a dreary and imperceptible gesture of negation she dismissed Foster's unspoken query, turning listlessly to mount the stairs to her room. He could not help her now. His sympathy was not what she craved in this hour of fear; his love, which she had long since divined might be hers for the asking, she had never for a moment dreamed of accepting.

Loyalty to her husband—a blind, unreasoning love, steadfast despite indifference, almost maternal in its desire to shield and cherish—this she owed to the imaginative, neglectful, self-centered man on the floor below. Thus, by her very nature, she had been through all the years, with nothing of unfaithfulness in act or thought. Thus she would always remain, so long as her husband lived.

II

LONG after she had retired, Mary Holdsworth lay wide-eyed in the gray half-light of the hotel room, listening to the subdued murmur of the rapids. She closed her eyes, but sleep did not come.

Instead, upon her inner vision beat the great waterfall, cruel and devouring, as she had seen it that evening. In the river's swift mid-stream current was borne the Bullet. Her morbid fancy pictured the swiftly accelerating dash to the cataract's brim, the sickening plunge into the void beneath.

The shuddering reality of the vision brought her breathless to her elbow, peering through the dimness at the monstrous, half-outlined objects grouped about her

bed. Why didn't Henry come? What could he be doing?

When at last she heard his footsteps pass her door, she dropped into a troubled slumber, harassed by repeated nightmares, which in the end drove sleep from her pillow. Her mind, abnormally active, sought to discover some means of preventing the experiment to-morrow. To-morrow? No—it was to-day!

With a sinking heart she sat up and reached for her watch on the table beside the bed. To her horror, its illuminated dial showed twenty minutes past three. In less than three hours either the passage of the falls would have been safely accomplished, or—

She trembled violently. Her hands were cold. What could she do? How could she prevent the experiment?

Her thoughts refused to attack this problem. Instead, from nooks and crannies of her mind came visions from the past—her first meeting with Henry Holdsworth, the brilliant young scientist; their laughter at the gloomy prophecy of their rainy July wedding day; Henry's experiments, his successes, his failures, his eccentricities; his gradual absorption in his work; Foster, his new assistant, whose respectful glances failed to hide his growing devotion.

She shook her head impatiently. Her thoughts turned to another subject—the origin of this strange experiment. She recalled the controversy over scientific construction between her husband and Professor Thurston, of Buffalo; the passage of the falls, cited in argument, by some queer twist becoming the storm center of the whole question; Holdsworth's determination to put Thurston in the wrong.

Six weeks of study and three months of construction had gone to the making of the Bullet. Then had come the long, tedious trip from the Middle West. She shuddered at the memory of its heart-sickening length, its maddening delays.

To-morrow the curious little craft was to be put to the test, with Holdsworth its only passenger, clad in a scientifically padded suit which covered his whole body and his head. The heavy, all-enveloping garment was a vital unit of the outfit, on which the inventor relied to absorb something of the shock incident to lighter construction.

Suddenly she was inspired. The suit lacking, Henry would be compelled to give

up his experiment. Would it not be possible to find it and conceal it?

She thought rapidly. Foster would have the bulky article of clothing, or at least would know its whereabouts. But would he connive at its concealment? Would his loyalty to his chief outweigh the appeal which she knew she could make to his feeling for her?

She began to dress hurriedly, glancing again at her watch. It was now past four o'clock; already a gleam of daylight showed itself in the east. Her knowledge of her husband rendered her practically certain that no undue anxiety was disturbing his slumbers.

Hastening on tiptoe past his room, she found herself before Foster's door. A light was visible through the transom. She stretched out her hand to knock, then hesitated and half withdrew it. Her hand went to her breast, as if to still the tumult of agitation within. What was the use? She turned as if to go; then, with sudden decision, her summons resounded upon the panel.

Foster, fully dressed, flung open the door. At sight of her he started back in astonishment. His voice revealed his amazement.

"Mrs. Holdsworth!"

"Yes," she said weakly. "I—I didn't sleep well. It's been worrying me. I wanted—may I come in?"

Foster stepped back from the doorway. Whatever emotions he may have felt—jealousy at her anxiety for her husband, pleasure that in this anxiety she should turn to him—were not betrayed by his impassive yet courteous tone.

"I've not slept well myself, Mrs. Holdsworth. It's a big undertaking—too big, I can't help thinking. That river certainly gets me. I've been here twice before, but every time one look is enough to start my knees knocking together. I always feel that the Lord never created those falls for people to monkey with!"

"That's just it!" she cried sharply. "It's so useless, so uncalled for! What benefit will it be to humanity if the Bullet does succeed? Just to vindicate Henry's theories and to satisfy his pride—that's all! If he were to risk his life to save others, or in some worth-while experiment, I should be proud of him; but to imperil it simply for a whim!"

She paused. Her hands fell to her sides.

"I want to stop it," she said simply. "That's why I've come to you. Will you help me?"

He stared at her incredulously.

"Stop it? You? But how?"

Her eyes gleamed eagerly.

"Hide the padded suit," she whispered. "Will you? Tell him it's lost. Tell him anything!"

Foster looked at her strangely, his glance full of pity.

"It wouldn't do," he said at length. "I am responsible for all preparations. The loss of the suit would mean the loss of my position. Worse than that, it would be a betrayal of trust. Think what this experiment means to him, Mrs. Holdsworth!"

Mary Holdsworth turned aside to hide her agitation. Her face worked piteously.

"Think what it means to *me*," she said at length in a low tone. "I love him, Burton. I would do anything to save him—anything! I thought I had faith in the Bullet. I haven't. I'm afraid—afraid of losing him. Help me, Burton!"

Her dark eyes were appealing. Foster found it difficult to refuse. She had never used his first name before.

"It's impossible, Mary," he said slowly.

"Burton! Won't you—for my sake?"

Her glance held his for a long moment. Then, suddenly, there leaped to his eyes an ardent gleam which betrayed his answer even before he had spoken.

"It is impossible!" he repeated in a tense, vibrant tone. "How can I hazard my reputation and forego my loyalty to my chief? My first duty is to your husband. For your sake I would do many things; do not ask me to do this!"

It was not possible for Mary Holdsworth to mistake his true meaning. To him, as to her, the failure of the experiment was as much an accepted fact as was its success to the scientist. In Foster's inmost thoughts, as in hers, a life hung in the balance. All too clearly she read the selfish motive masked by his specious plea of loyalty.

"Please!" she murmured piteously.

"It is out of the question," he said in a polite, expressionless voice. "Now—you will excuse me, will you not? I have much to do. My duty lies at the wharf. The professor will be rising soon."

Early dawn shone through the eastern window. A pale ray fell on Mary Holdsworth's paler face. Foster snapped off the

electric light, and the pallid gray of day-break filled the room.

"Five o'clock," he said.

After a brief silence she spoke dully, her eyes fixed on the floor.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that you won't help me. I shall have to give that plan up, I suppose." She spoke in a sort of monotone. "Where have you put it?"

Understanding that she meant the suit, he motioned to the far corner of the room. She crossed to it, gazing at the heavy garment as if seeing it for the first time. After a moment she picked it up uncertainly.

"You're going to be busy until six o'clock, you said? May I take it? I want to bid Henry farewell."

"You'll not hide it?" queried Foster in some apprehension. "You promise?"

She turned her head. He was to remember for a long time the indescribable sorrow in her eyes and the ineffable pathos of her face, its pallid oval half in shadow, as she paused on the threshold.

"I will not hide it," she said. "I promise. There will be no delay. Thank you for listening to me—and good-by."

The next moment, looking through the open door, he saw only the dim light cast by the red-shrouded night lamp in the cool hallway.

III

THE ever enthralling spectacle of man's conflict with the forces of nature swept clean the hotels, the stores, the offices, the homes. An hour before the experiment was to take place all points of vantage were lined with palpitating humanity, clinging desperately to the iron railings along the adjacent cliffs, or festooned like flies upon the long bridges.

Some there were who prayed for the safety of the intrepid scientist upon his perilous journey. Others there were, and many of them, who in their inmost hearts desired a spectacular tragedy. Human nature has changed but little since the Colosseum, and sacrifice still thrills human hearts beneath the veneer of civilization, as in the days when Christians were cast to the lions.

The morning was clear and cool. The level rays of the July sun, just rising above the low hills to the east, touched with singular beauty the river's banks, sparkling in scintillant reflection from the spray above the falls. The stream in the gorge below

still flowed dark and ominous. No ray of sunlight illumined the foot of the falls, where boiling currents ran cold in the dimness amid the huge rocks that split the plunging water into a thousand thousand fragments.

Below the falls and rapids, at the point where the Bullet would be drawn ashore if it made the passage in safety, waited many. Above the falls, surrounding the roped-in space which kept them from the Bullet's pier, lingered a scattered band, desirous of taking what they secretly expected to be their last look at Professor Holdsworth. But the bulk of the spectators, massed on bridges and cliffs, had chosen points just below the cataract, whence the Bullet's plunge into the abyss could best be seen.

Within the roped-in inclosure Burton Foster moved steadily, swiftly, setting everything in last-minute readiness, testing the fastenings of the inner and outer doors, seeing that the ropes could be cast loose instantly. His face was pale, but determined. Lines of fatigue, set there by his sleepless night, were belied by the inflexible gaze of his gray eyes.

He looked at his watch. Five minutes to six! The hour did not alarm him, for Holdsworth's punctuality was proverbial. Within five minutes the Bullet's passenger would appear at the door of the hotel. Foster's mouth set in a firm line.

Downstream, also, the feeling was growing tense as the hour approached. Women, their eyes fixed upon the emerald wall of water, bit their lips nervously. Men, laughing boisterously but mechanically, chewed violently upon cigars long since allowed to go out. Watches were consulted with increasing frequency. Of course there would probably be delay in starting. There always was; still, one never could tell. It was best to keep one's eyes open.

The minute hands on thousands of time-pieces crept slowly toward the vertical, and past it. Field-glasses were trained on the bend above the falls, around which the Bullet would appear. Slowly, slowly, the moments passed; slowly, slowly—

"There she comes!"

Far up the stream, gliding through the white water of the rapids, appeared the glistening black curve of the Bullet. Along the shore beside it, already far in the rear, raced the fringe of spectators who had waited to see the casting off. A tense sigh went up from the crowd.

Foster, left alone at the pier, stared at the fast disappearing craft. Dimly he wondered why Mary Holdsworth had not been present to witness the start of the experiment; but his mind was centered upon the bobbing black object in mid stream.

Was it success, or failure? In five minutes a signal from below the rapids would proclaim the result. In five minutes he would know—

He turned suddenly as a wild cry rang out from the hotel behind him. Down the steps plunged a frenzied figure, his clothes torn, his hair flying, his eyes ablaze. Foster grew dizzy and faint as he looked into the contorted features of Professor Holdsworth.

"Foster!" shouted the scientist, gasping with rage and fatigue. "Where have you been? Why didn't you help me? I've been locked in my room—had to smash the door down! My suit's been stolen! Wake up! Why don't you do something? Don't stand there looking like that!"

Foster's brain refused to comprehend the meaning of the scientist's words. He gaped stupidly at Holdsworth.

"What—what are you doing here, sir?" he stammered.

"Doing?" raved Holdsworth. "I'm trying to keep this test from failure. Why don't you help me? What have you done with my suit? What have you—"

"Your suit?" repeated the younger man dazedly. "Weren't you in it when you got into the Bullet a minute ago?"

Holdsworth started back in horror. His eyes flew to the pier, then swept the swift-flowing surface of the river. Far downstream he caught a momentary glimpse of the tiny cylinder, its polished blackness gleaming in the morning sunshine. Then it was gone from sight around the bend.

"Mary!" he cried, rushing out upon the pier.

There was no answer but the ominous roar of the falls. Foster had dropped upon the wooden steps, his head in his hands.

"And I never knew!" he groaned. "I never dreamed! In that suit—I helped her in—helped to fasten the hatches down—"

He choked, shaken by racking sobs.

Holdsworth did not hear him. He stood upon the outer end of the pier, his quivering hands outstretched, his thin body trembling with emotion.

"Mary! Not you! Not you!"

Gone the dignified calm, the studied reserve, which had hemmed him in for so many years. Gone the science-based faith in his vaunted knowledge of construction. He was just a man, a husband, a lover, who finds his mate in deadly peril. A ray of sun struck upon his uplifted face, transfiguring it.

"Mary! Mary! Come back!"

From afar down the river a cry welled up from a thousand throats. It was succeeded by a deadly calm.

Holdsworth staggered blindly forward, his unseeing eyes fixed upon the relentless waters flowing chill and deep toward the cataract's brim. With a cry Foster sprang to his side, catching him as the scientist swayed at the very edge of the pier.

"Not that, sir!" he exclaimed.

The professor turned to him, clutching the younger man's sleeve with his thin, blue-veined hands. From his tremulous throat came a long-drawn, quivering sob. Then he took an uncertain, wavering step, pointing dumbly toward the front of the hotel.

Foster understood. Half carrying the older man, he darted up the path. A touring car stood at the curb. Gently placing the scientist in the tonneau, he climbed to the driver's seat, and the big car leaped forward down the winding highway which skirted the cliff above the lower rapids.

IV

A MILE downstream crowds thronged clamoring about a woman, ghastly pale, emerging half stunned from the rock-scarred hatchway of the Bullet, too dazed as yet to rejoice at the miracle of her survival, too bewildered to answer the queries or reply to the congratulations of the curious multitude that thrilled with the wonder of her daring venture.

Through the mass of spectators, straight to the heart of the mob, a white-faced man thrust his way. From the road above he had seen the miracle, and, seeing, had not believed.

Then, heedless of the hundreds of staring eyes, the scientist clasped his wife in his arms. Tears of happiness streamed down his face as he uttered broken words of love and endearment—words which meant more to Mary Holdsworth than any scientific triumph, and beside which the life she had risked seemed as nothing.

A Polite Question

PROVING ONCE MORE THAT CONSCIENCE MAKES COWARDS

By George Allan England

THE bullet that had shattered Venable's right forearm was still lodged there as young Lascord's deft fingers squeaked the skeleton key around in the lock. Lillian Venable eased the door open. The trio listened with ears of acuteness such as only the hunted have. No sound!

A moment, and all three were inside the unknown apartment. The door was shut again, temporarily muring the three fugitives from the world, giving them a respite, a breathing spell.

The silence held taut. All three remained unbreathing. Their hearts kept pounding like slack drums. In that infolded stillness those heartbeats seemed to cry:

"Here we are! Come, take us! Here we are!"

But no voice sounded, no footfall stirred. Utter calm filled the strange dwelling; vague half-lights softened all its aspects to mystery.

"Maybe we're in luck, and there's nobody home," whispered Lascord.

For all that he drew his gun. Under his carefully-tended mustache his lip drew back wolfishly. No wolf's teeth ever showed whiter than his, or more cruel. In his face—handsome with the kind of devil-may-care abandon for which certain types of women go to destruction—recklessness of life, of every moral code, stood revealed.

"Maybe there's nobody home," he repeated, his voice far from that of a slum product—which, by the way, he emphatically was not. "If there's anybody here, though—"

"Put that away, Cordy!" breathed Venable's wife. She laid a plump and shapely hand on Lascord's, forcing the weapon down. "No noise, mind you! Here—here's the ticket!"

She drew from her coat pocket a slung

shot, neatly braided with leather around a leaden core, and slipped it into his hand as he put away his gun. It gave promise of more silent action than the thirty-two, yet action equally effective, should anybody inopportunely appear with embarrassing demands as to who this trio might be and what they wanted here, at this late hour of an October afternoon.

"You're right, Lillian," Lascord agreed, getting a firm, sinewy hold of the vicious slung shot, one well-placed blow of which would have felled an ox. "We've got to keep the soft pedal on now. Come on—let's see what's what!"

"Wait a minute," whispered Venable, a man of perhaps fifty, meatily built, black-bearded. "Get that knife out of my pocket, Lil. I can feel it with my hand, but my arm's dead."

The woman made a little wry mouth of disgust as she thrust her hand into her husband's pocket, where lay his helpless reddened hand. Her aversion to Venable shuddered at touch of him thus; but she drew out the knife.

"Open it. Give it here."

She obeyed. Venable gripped the horn handle in his still serviceable left.

"All right now!"

Together, they scouted down the hallway. Still there was no sound. Everything hung tomb-silent.

The invaders got impressions of comfortable, mediocre furnishings. Two doors gaped, revealing a little parlor, a bedroom, empty of life. Cautiously Lascord opened a third door and peered in.

"Dining room's all right."

"Nobody in the kitchen or the bathroom," announced Venable, who had pressed forward. "We're in blooming luck!"

"Lord, yes!" answered Lascord, daring to speak aloud. "Boy! As a getaway—"

"Some getaway!" judged the woman.

She turned, retraced her steps down the hall, and put up the chain.

It had indeed been some getaway—the swift attack on the clerk laden with money for the Harrison-Magoon pay-roll; the brief pistol battle; the leap into the waiting car—then the whirl through many streets, doubling on their tracks; the abandonment of the car; the carefully planned and unconcerned stroll through Hillyard's department-store, whose crowds had received them as old ocean receives three drops of rain.

After that, the attempt to reach their prearranged hiding-place on Cumberland Avenue; the sudden panic as they had seen a "bull" ahead of them, another beating up from the rear; the speedy fading into the first doorway that had offered—then the ascent of many stairs to the roof; the retreat along that roof to an open-doored housing that had let them once descend; the spur-of-the-moment decision to chance any port in a storm; and so—this.

"Blooming luck," Venable repeated. "Damned if it isn't!"

"Well," assented Lascord, with a nervous laugh and a little twist at his mustache, "we've got time to breathe and turn around, anyhow."

Venable's wife rejoined them.

"We'll scatter from here, instead of from Cumberland Avenue," said she.

The half-light revealed her as a trim-built woman of anywhere from twenty-five to forty. With women of that type, there's no telling. Just now she happened to be a blonde. Lascord's glance, now that the hunting cry had slackened off, glinted with more than mere admiration of her full-bosomed personality.

"Right!" he agreed. "We'll split the bundle here, and go our separate ways rejoicing. Stupid of you, though," he glibed Venable, "to have gone and got yourself shot like that! You killed your man just a tenth of a second too late, eh? Now you've let yourself in for all kinds of possibilities."

Lascord seemed to roll the savor of Venable's unpleasant situation under a tongue of malice.

"You're mighty sorry!" growled the elder man. He, like the others, spoke as men speak who move in other worlds than the under. "My arm's certainly a mess!"

It hung paralyzed; but the blood oozing down his fingers did not show, for the hand

was thrust deep into his pocket. His wife smiled.

"If that chance shot had hit your head, old dear," she mocked, "you'd have got out of it uninjured. Haven't got a smoke, have you, Cordy?"

"Wait!" glowered Venable. "Let's get the lay of the land here first."

Cautiously, with the keenness of animals pursued, the two men investigated their situation. Lillian, calmer than either, walked into the dining room. She wanted a cigarette, and wanted it badly. If the men wouldn't give her one, she intended to do a little scouting on her own.

"Five rooms and bath," said Venable, when he and Lascord rejoined the woman.

Her quest had been fruitful. She was sitting calmly enough in front of the fireplace, empty of fuel though it was, and already she had half consumed a Turkish cigarette.

"Looks as if two men and two women lived here," added Lascord.

He put the shade of one of the dining-room windows a little way up. The increased light revealed him as a slender fellow, something of a dandy. It also showed Venable's heavy features and dark, saturnine eyes eloquent of pain.

"They're probably all out, at work," the latter suggested. "We've probably got an hour or so to get cleaned up and away."

"We'll take no hour," declared Lascord. "This is no kind of a place to get trapped in. It's one of these confounded up-to-date apartments where there's no back stairway, and the dumb-waiter wouldn't hold a cat. No fire escapes on the rear, either. If we don't make it by the front way, we're done!"

"That fireplace looks good to me, though," said Venable. "It'll come in handy for burning our clothes. But if we only had some oil—"

"I saw a can of gas in the kitchen. I suppose they use it for cleaning gloves and things."

"Good! Well, now, let's get busy. Come, Lil!"

"What have I got to do?" the woman asked.

She crossed one knee over the other, displaying well-silked legs.

"You're cool, all right," said her husband, frowning. "Anybody'd think, to see you, this was just a little informal afternoon tea!"

"Well, isn't it?" she smiled, through smoke. "For one, I'm going to have a cup or two before I leave."

"For one," Venable returned sharply, "you're going to help get this arm of mine patched up! If it was Cordy, here, that had been shot, you wouldn't be so damned indifferent!"

"Jealous, old dear?" she mocked.

"Throw that tack away and get busy!" her husband commanded. He took her by the arm and dragged her up. "No nonsense from you, now. Get up out of that chair!"

"Don't play rough, precious! Remember there's quite another kind of a chair waiting for you, if they catch you now. You've been rough enough for *one* day, I should think."

He shook her and thrust her toward the door.

"That 'll do for you!" he growled.

Lascord's mouth tightened to a line under the foppish mustache. He and the woman shot each other a look.

"Yes, we shall need your help, Lillian," said Lascord.

"Oh, all right," she gave in, and tossed her cigarette into the grate. "If I've got to play nurse, I suppose I've got to. But—how stupid to shoot a tenth of a second too late!"

II

Now that the fugitives had a perfectly clear understanding of their situation, they proceeded without further delay with the work of escape. Delaying not, they commenced to carry into effect their plan of "splitting the bundle" and of scattering out. Crooks of their intelligence will not long remain together after a crime.

First of all, the two men took from their pockets the heavy sheaves of currency they had "frisked" from the satchel of the murdered Harrison-Magoon paymaster in the little passageway where they had ambushed him. They laid all this money in a pile on the dining-room table—money as yet uncounted, but dizzying in amount. They could see that by the most cursory glance. Most of the packets were taped with gummed paper strips printed with figures indicating one thousand or five thousand dollars, and one was labeled as containing ten thousand. This last showed a dark smear of blood—though that blood was not Venable's.

"It's a good haul, all right," approved Lascord. "Rather the best we've ever made."

"Yes," agreed Venable, while the woman glanced with an odd expression at a little clock on the mantel. "Worth killing that fellow for. I'd have turned him off for half this. He put up a good scrap, eh? If I hadn't been quick with my gun—"

"A game one, he was!" approved Lascord. "He still hung on to that satchel when your bullet was in his neck and he was bleeding like a pig. I just had to pry him loose. This is some of his blood now, on that ten-thousand-dollar packet."

"We've got to wash that off, after I get patched up."

"You'd better burn it," suggested Lillian. "Those are big bills. Excuse me from handling any of them, with blood on! Why, they're a mess! You'll never get them clean."

"She's right," approved Lascord. "I don't want any part of that bundle. And we haven't any time to waste experimenting round. Somebody's liable to come in here any minute—and then where do we fit? Let's hop to it!"

"You're yellow!" sneered Venable. "Always were and always will be! Well, I'm not burning any ten thousand. I'll take a chance. Now, going to help me fix my arm?"

Leaving the contents of their pockets on the dining-room table, the men went into the bathroom. Lillian followed. The bath, they found, overlooked the street. A sash curtain shielded the lower half of the window; a green shade, the upper. Lascord helped Venable boggle off his coat.

"This has certainly got to be burned," said the younger man. "The sleeve's a dead give-away; so's your shirt. We'll make a good, thorough change. Let's show some speed!"

He got Venable's waistcoat and shirt off, too, and threw them over a chair with the coat.

"Wheee-oo!" he whistled faintly, as he saw Venable's arm.

The woman remained unmoved. The arm was ugly, already swollen and bluish. A venomous hole showed where the bullet had gone in, but there was no exit. Caked blood darkened the wrist and the hand. The fingers were stiffly numb.

"Bullet's in there, all right!" commented Lascord. "Move your fingers?"

He started the hot water.

"No," answered Venable, and swore with the pain of the effort.

"Lucky if you don't get blood poisoning or something, and lose that arm," smiled Lillian. "Looks to me as if the bone was mashed to a pulp. Remember how your friend Bressler got less than that in the leg, and gangrene set in? That was what landed him as a lifer."

"You're a cheerful wife, aren't you?" snarled Venable, his pain heightened by anger. "Take my things out in the dining room and burn them. Quicker they're out of the way, the better."

She picked up the garments, but Lascord interposed.

"No, you stay here and help Ven wash up. I'm not going to have you monkeying round with fire and a can of gas. I'll burn them."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," growled Venable. "You'll not get out of my sight while that money's uncounted! I trust you about as far as I can throw an elephant by the tail. And what's more, Cordy, it seems to me you're damned solicitous about my wife's welfare!"

Lascord changed color a bit, and was going to make the retort discourteous, when Lillian interposed.

"Stop! No time now for tomfoolery. Give me a towel!"

Lascord handed her one. Venable plunged his hand into the bowl nearly full of hot water, and with his other hand began laving the mutilated arm.

"God!" he groaned, whitening with pain. His wife was about to dip the towel and help him, but he forbade. "No! No wet cloths here. They won't burn. This 'll do for now. Just rip that towel up and bandage me. It 'll hold me till I can get to Doc Merritt."

With Lascord's help, the woman stripped the towel in three and tightly banded the wound. Venable set his teeth. Lillian found safety pins in a box of little feminine oddments on a shelf, and pinned the bandages; but so carelessly that one pin jabbed the shattered arm.

The murderer swore vividly.

"As a trained nurse," he added, "you're my idea of nothing at all!"

She shrugged her plump shoulders and fluffed up the hair round her ears, which were as prettily pink a pair as ever heard an unloved husband say bad words.

"I'm not worrying much about your ideas, old precious," she replied, smiling cryptically. "And from now on, Venny, old chap, you might as well begin restraining your temper and your tongue. A man that's wanted for purposes of electrical experiment by the State shouldn't be disagreeable to his darling wife!"

Lascord smiled sagely at that; and again his eye caught the woman's. Venable's dark face flushed.

"What the devil and all is going on between you two, anyhow?" he thought poisonously; but, being a wise man in the tightest of tight places, he was careful to hold his tongue.

Meanwhile the little clock in the dining room was ticking steadily on. Moments were passing—moments of destiny.

III

SWIFTLY now the trio finished their work.

Both men shaved—or, rather, Lascord shaved himself and then Venable, whose one hand would not suffice for the work. This was all in accordance with their pre-arranged plan, though of course they had planned to carry it out at the Cumberland Avenue hiding place.

Amateur criminals, when disguising, usually assume false hair and beards—a clumsy method, easily detected. Not thus work skilled professionals. Such often prepare for a coup, weeks in advance, by growing hair and whiskers. These they wear in committing the crime. Thereafter, scissors and a razor effectually change them. Few pursuers can recognize, in a smooth face, the features once bearded.

"Well, that's that," said Lascord, carefully replacing all the shaving things and closing the little cabinet. "Now for clothes!"

There were clothes a plenty for all three. They all made a complete change of their outer garments, taking others that fitted them well. From these they ripped identifying marks.

They bundled all their own clothes into the fireplace, keeping nothing but the pistol, the knife, and the slung shot. Their disguise was excellent.

"There isn't one of us but what can walk away from here all right," observed Venable. "Especially me."

"I don't know," said his wife. "That arm—"

"Who knows? Doesn't that look natural, the way I've got it in this coat pocket?"

"Well—"

"Get the gas, Cordy," Venable commanded, "and let's finish this."

Lillian lighted another cigarette, while Lascord fetched the can of gasoline and a cup.

Fire leaped eagerly under the compulsion of a little—safely little—gasoline. For a moment the trio contemplated their burning clothes.

"We're playing in luck," said Lascord. "A few minutes, and there'll be just ashes in that grate." He doused on another judiciously small portion of gas. With a whoof and a roar the flames blazed up. "Luck—Lord, yes!"

Silence for a moment, while on the table still lay the thick packets of money—some of it grimly darkened. Venable picked up his knife, the only weapon that now remained to him; for in the mêlée his gun had dropped from his shot-numbed fingers. He pocketed the knife.

"Come on!" said he. "Let's count the stuff, now, and be on our way. We want to be out of here when the folks come home."

"Their name's Ellison," said his wife. "It's on the towels, and in a book, there. This blue serge suit I've got on is Mrs. Ellison's."

"Trust a woman's curiosity to find out nonessential details!" girded Venable.

"Details sometimes count in little affairs like this," she retorted, her lips cruel.

Again her eyes sought Lascord's, and for a moment dwelt there. Venable had them both under scrutiny. Tensions rose tighter still.

"I'll have a smoke, too, I guess," half yawned Lascord. He took one of the Ellison family's cigarettes from a little bronze box on the mantel, and lighted up. "Excellent Ellisons will be astonished, eh, when they come home and find nice cozy fire all lighted?"

"Really, we're not at all concerned with that," growled Venable, "just so there's nothing identifiable left here."

"Ellisons will infer," continued Lascord, pouring the last little bit of the cup of gasoline into the grate, "when they find their clothes gone, that malefactors—completely mysterious—have come in here and burned 'em up. The riddle will never be solved. Shows how most mysteries originate by ar-

guing from a false premise. People believe a certain thing is true and act accordingly, and do extraordinarily stupid things, when if they only stopped to think—"

"I wish you'd stop talking!" snapped Venable. "Put that gas away, and come back here and help me count that money!"

Lascord nodded.

"It's all right, Cordy," smiled the woman. "I'm here. My honey-bunch won't slip any of it into his jeans while I'm watching!"

Lascord smiled unpleasantly, and went to put the gasoline can and the cup back in the kitchen. The second he was out of the room, Venable's left hand snapped up his wife's wrist.

"Here, you!" he snarled. "What's going on between you two, anyhow?"

"Nothing's going, Venny dear. Something's staying."

"What?"

"You, love."

He was minded to strike her; but there was that in her eyes which stayed his hand.

"You'd just better not, old bean!" she added. "I've got something proper on you now. You've hit me for the last time!"

"Ah, you go to—"

"I can't, love. I'm there already—tied up to you."

No man, says Shaw, is a match for a woman except with a poker and a pair of hobnailed boots, and not always even then. Obviously this was no time for any kind of argument, verbal or material. The husband dropped her wrist.

"There's something damned wrong going on!" he spat. "You'd better cut it—for *his* sake. My right hand won't always be crippled, and I'm quick on the trigger. Now you know!"

She braved him with a tiny laugh that seared.

"Really, dear," she answered, "you're quite too funny."

Lascord returning, the passage ended there.

"Now, then," demanded Lascord—he looked very debonair in the light gray suit he had appropriated from the smaller of the two unknown Ellisons, and with his lip fresh-shaven—"now, then, we're ready to split the bundle and go our separate ways rejoicing."

"I don't know about this splitting and this separate ways business," returned Venable, corroded with jealousy.

In his mind's eye he already could see his wife meeting Lascord somewhere. With two-thirds of the loot they would make a clean getaway, leaving him to hold the bag. He now entertained no doubt that the woman, even if not Lascord, would anonymously "turn him up" to the police, if once she should get away from him; and the terrible weapon he had put into her hand by murdering that paymaster made him shudder to the deepest marrow. His eyes glowed with the hate that kills, as he continued:

"You go wherever you want to, Lascord. Take your slice, and be on your way. Lil and I—we're sticking together."

"What?" demanded the younger man, his mouth sagging a trifle open. "But—"

"I've got my plan, all right, for Lil's getaway and mine. Yours is your own business."

Venable spoke with inflexible and dogged determination.

"Which of us gets the gun?" demanded Lascord.

"Take it—and be on the hike."

"But see here, Venny! It's not safe, you two together. It upsets all our plans." He made an unsteady gesture. "You can't kick over the apple cart like that! You two 'll be spotted—"

"Stop worrying about us!" laughed Venable sourly, while on the mantel the clock still ticked off the fateful moments. "I was in this business when you were still a bank clerk and on the level. There's your hat, Cordy—or Ellison's. What's your hurry?"

The younger man's eyes sought Lillian. She nodded slightly.

"Well—all right," Lascord agreed.

"But—"

Venable turned toward the money on the table.

"Come on, let's count this," said he, "and get some action!"

Lillian yawned behind well-manicured fingers.

"I'll give a glance out the front window and see that all's clear," said she. "Then the best little thing you can do, Cordy, is to flit while the flitting's good."

As the men began thumbing the bills, she walked out of the dining room. Her eyes were troubled; between them a vertical line of displeasure had drawn.

"Damned old pill!" she murmured. "But wait—wait!"

She entered the little parlor, discreetly drew aside the curtains, and cast a quick, inclusive glance up and down. There was no sign of trouble. People were passing along the opposite sidewalk, four stories below; but no one seemed to be watching the house.

"All right!" she nodded to herself. "Nothing to be afraid of. Easy!"

As she came back into the hall, the idea struck her of spying out of the apartment door. She slipped the chain, pushed back the bolt, and drew the door open about three inches.

"Oh!"

For all her training, the gasp came involuntarily. She stood for a moment petrified, with glazing eyes. Then, as all the color drained back from her face to her terror-smitten heart, she closed the door.

Pale, where no rouge prevented pallor, she ran on noiseless feet—feet winged with panic—back along the hall.

Quivering, distraught, she flung into the dining room, where the two men were busily counting the price of murder.

"God!" she choked. "The—the bulls!"

IV

LASCORD whipped round. Venable recoiled, his one free hand quivering.

"What—what?"

"The bulls!" Lillian's voice was hardly a gasp. She clutched her hands together and wrung them till the flesh of the white fingers leaped into whiter ridges. "Harness bull outside the door, there. I—"

"No!" cried Venable, his eyes bulging.

"Yes, yes! I saw him. He—he was talking with—man in next apartment. He saw me!"

Frozen silence greeted this appalling news. Then Lascord whispered:

"It's all off! Well, damn it—I didn't shoot! They can't prove—"

"Yellow pup!" sneered Venable. He laughed silently, with savage exultation. His eyes blazed. "We're in for a scrap now. Only one way out o' here—front way. That means—"

"What you going to do, Venny?" quavered the woman, instinctively leaning on the greater strength of the man she hated.

"What you going to do?"

"Sh-h! Let me think, now—let me think!"

Veins swelled bunchily on his temples. His lips vised to a hard, pale line.

"This kale's got to go, anyhow," Lascord began. "Quick! They've got nothing on Lil and me—can't prove anything, if this bundle's out o' the way!"

"Cut it, you pup!" commanded Venable, while his wife with shaking hands seemed supplicating. The older man had swiftly made himself master of the situation. "There's just one thing we can do now."

"What's that?" gulped Lascord, his bloodless face distorted.

"It's—"

The tingling *brrrrrrr* of the electric bell in the hallway snipped Venable's words. It seared into the consciousness of the guilty trio like a summons of doom, as the officer's finger pressed the button.

"Damn him, he'll never get in alive!" mouthed Lascord, and reached for the gun on the table.

"Fool!" snarled Venable. He thrust back the other's clutch. "Shows how much sense *you* got!" Lillian crouched, a figure of panic, in a corner. "No time now for a frontal play!"

"What, then?"

"Strategy! That's all that 'll get us by. Go, Lil—go, let him in!"

"What, Venny? What—what's that?" she quavered.

"You heard me the first time!" Venable's tone scoured. "Let the bull in. Tell him I'm here. Act hysterical—just like you are now. You'll do, fine! Tell him Lascord's gone. Say I'm wounded, damn near dead—in the kitchen. He'll come in, all right. You follow him down the hall—see? He'll pass this door, and Cordy 'll slug him with the shot—knock him cold. Then we'll cut and run for it. It's a slim chance, but it's the only one we've got. Go!"

"Wait!" quivered Lascord. "She's a woman. I—love her. Damn you, *know* it if you want to! She loves me, too. Let me go!"

"No!" Venable's tone was as cold as ice. "You've got to do the slugging. Oh, curse this bum wing of mine! If I only had the use of it—"

Again the door-bell shrilled its inexorable demand, longer this time than the first.

"No use stalling," snapped Venable. "He's wise. If we wait, he'll get another one and smash in. Get along, Lil! Be sure you tell him the kitchen. We'll do the rest. Go!"

All atremble, but gathering her forces, Lillian once more started down the hall. As she reached the door, the bell a third time impatiently summoned.

Shaken with spasmodic chills of panic, Lillian fumbled the door open. The blue bulk there in front of her loomed like destiny.

For a silent second the woman stared at him, pale, with the mockery of those rouged blotches burning her cheeks. Her eyes showed rimmed with the white of a consuming terror.

The officer touched his cap and asked a succinct question.

Lillian stared, choked, caught at her breast. Then she pulled herself together, nodded.

"Yes—yes—wait just a minute, please!"

She snapped the door shut. With quivering knees she ran back down the hallway.

The staccato crash of a gun in the dining room stopped her, screaming.

From that room a grunt issued; something fell, thuddingly. Lillian screamed again, and ran on.

At the outer door a heavy fist banged. There followed a crushing impact. Wood splintered. A powerful boot crashed the lock. The door slammed against the wall. Gun in hand, the officer charged down the dark hall.

At the dining-room door he paused. Screams, high and rising, issued thence. Dazed by the tableau that burst upon his vision, the officer stared.

Money—money everywhere. Money on the table, money on the floor. Money, jammed-up fistfuls of it, blazing in the fireplace. A thin young man, his face trickled with blood, crumpled face down—a young man whose head had been drilled clean by a bullet. Over the young man a crouching, screaming woman; at one side a stout, fresh-shaven man with a gun in his left hand.

That gun whanged again. A bullet, badly aimed, grazed the officer, snicked plaster from the wall behind him.

The officer fired. The left-handed man sagged forward; but even as he sagged, once more he shot—this time at the crouching woman.

She moaned, grew limp over the body of the slim man on the floor—a man whose right hand held a slung shot.

The stout man slumped down, dropped his gun, coughed, and clawed at his lungs.

"Damn you, Lascord!" he mouthed, in a bubble of bright crimson froth. "You, too, Lill! I—see it all now. Fool not to—see—sooner. Frame me, will you? Bring me here—frame me—have me sent to the chair!" He fought desperately for breath, and strangled horribly. "Then you two—turn State's evidence—do a little time, and—beat it together—but nothing doing—nothing—"

It ended in a gush of scarlet. The stout man twitched and grew still.

During one moment of utter blankness the officer remained staring. Then words came.

"Well, by the Lord Harry! What—*what* a rough-house to butt into—an' me just after askin' that lady there a polite question! Askin' her if she'd please take a couple o' tickets to the policemen's ball!"

The Ranger's Wife

THE STORY OF A WOLF AND A WOMAN

By Mary Imlay Taylor

THE cypress trees were casting long shadows. The afternoon sun had traveled slowly up to the top of the red walls of the cañon, and sparkled there like a set of crown jewels. Jansen, of the bridge builders, old Kerwalt, and two others were sitting in the grass at the lip of the chasm.

"It looks kind o' black before sunset, don't it?" Jansen remarked abruptly.

"Black where?" grunted Kerwalt, who was a digger, being too old and unsteady now for the dynamite squad.

Jansen pointed the end of his pipe down at the river fifty feet below us. It ran here like a race horse, for the walls of the cañon were narrow.

No one answered; the silence of content and a full pipe fell on the group. A blue jay whirled across, its brilliant wings glittering in the sunshine.

"Thief, thief!" the bird screamed.

The ranger came up the trail, followed by his shadow—at least it looked like a shadow, but it was a lean, gray-brown, shaggy beast with red eyes, its tongue lolling, its bushy tail at half-mast. The ranger smiled at us. He was a big man with a bronzed, square face, blue eyes, and a short, grizzled beard.

"Hello, Jansen! Howdy, Kerwalt? How's your arm?"

The old man rubbed his elbow.

"Better. Reckon it couldn't noways crack a boulder, though."

The ranger laughed. He was moving off when one of the others—a young fellow, a newcomer—sang out:

"Sell me your dog, Ashford?"

Jansen kicked him—kicked him viciously just above the ankle.

Ashford had stopped. He was looking at the boy strangely, and the sun made fire in his blue eyes; but he said nothing. After a moment he turned and walked steadily down the path. Behind him, padding softly, tagged his silent follower, head down, scenting the trail. It was so still that the roar of the river, pushing its flood through the narrowing gorge to the south of us, sounded like a bombardment.

The boy rubbed his ankle, scowling at Jansen. The foreman took his pipe out of his mouth and addressed him.

"There's a heap more in heaven and earth than you know of, kid," he said scornfully.

"What's he got that rag-bag of a dog for, then?" snapped the youth.

"Ain't a dog," said Kerwalt dryly. "That's a timber wolf."

There was another long pause. Four pairs of eyes followed the big khaki-clad figure of the ranger and the gray shadow of the wolf. The two followed the green ledge along the cañon wall, turned a corner, and disappeared suddenly behind a big rose-colored cliff of limestone.

Jansen knocked the ashes out of his pipe. A spark dropped like a star into the depths.

"A mighty lonesome place for a woman," he remarked irrelevantly. "Ten years ago there wasn't a skirt inside two hundred miles. In a hard winter the timber wolves used to come down the cañon and yelp. I've heard 'em serenading twenty miles off—echo and all. Where did you bury that old she-wolf, Kerwalt?"

The old man scratched his elbow.

"Up to the pass. I blowed the hole out with dynamite and covered it good with earth."

Jansen nodded, pulling at his pipe.

The young man, who had been rubbing his ankle, still stinging from the kick of a heavy shoe, grew impatient.

"What in mischief do we care about a she-wolf?" he growled. "What's it all about, anyhow? Is the ranger crazy?"

The others exchanged glances, and Jansen laid his pipe down on the ledge. He had been foreman for five years. He was in the gang when John Ross came up the cañon looking for game and found the she-wolf. The big foreman leaned back against a gnarled cypress and began to whittle a stick.

"I'll tell you about it," he said slowly. "It's a longish story. If you repeat it, my boy, I'll—"

He stopped and raised his big hand significantly to his throat.

"I'm no gossip!" retorted the boy sullenly, reddening under his tan.

II

"ASHFORD married about ten years ago," began the foreman. "He went East, and brought the girl back with him. She'd lived in a little snug town on the coast—all green trees and whitewashed fences and flowers, musicales, church socials, tea-drinkings, and dances on the side. Her name, before she was married to the ranger, was Elsie Dunn. Pretty? Say, I don't know as I ever saw her match—black-eyed like a gypsy, black-haired, red-lipped, slim as a hazel rod. Ashford thought she'd come right down from heaven—a regular angel. She wasn't that. God bless your soul, there wasn't any angel about Elsie, only just plain girl."

"She was eighteen years old, and a bit wild after she'd been mewed up in the cañon for a year. At first she liked it. She'd whistle like first one bird and then another. She rode with Ashford. When she came, she couldn't sit straight in the

saddle; but in a month she rode like a boy. Then she began to mope—she wanted company. Ashford didn't know it. He'd settled down to work—three meals a day and the little wife to cook 'em, see?

"Elsie moped a lot. Her big eyes got bigger, she lost her color, and then the baby was born. Ashford thought he was going to lose her. She ran out of the house that night, mad as a hatter. We were all out searching. Ashford had sent for a nurse, but there wasn't any one there but the doctor. He got there just after Elsie went out. We were searching around in the dark when we heard a wolf howl. Ashford gave a shout and ran, swinging his lantern. Somehow the doc tumbled up the cliff after him, and we heard a kid crying. That was the way her baby was born, ten feet from the edge of the cañon, and the wolf led us.

"Elsie came around all right, and the baby was a fine boy; but she kept talking about a woman being left alone till she was crazy. Seemed to most of us that she hated the kid. She wasn't so pretty in one way, but in another she was a heap prettier, for her eyes just blazed with light. Ashford couldn't think of anything but her and the baby. He'd carry the kid for hours. Somehow he found that wolf—it was a lean she-wolf, and he coaxed it and fed it and half tamed it. It used to come to the house regularly for scraps. Elsie hated it. I've seen her stamp and scream at it.

"Jansen," she said to me one day, 'if I don't go East, I'm goin' to kill myself!'

"It went on like that till the kid was over two years old. Ashford wanted to take her East, but he couldn't—had to stay on the job. It was a fearful cold winter, and the wolves were yelping in the cañon. Elsie couldn't stand it. Ashford said she didn't sleep, just walked the floor when the howling started. With the echo, it was something like a jazz band.

"Still, he would feed that she-wolf. She was hungry, and she'd come right up to the kitchen door for food. Elsie threw dishes at her, but she kept coming and coming. Ashford got worn and cross, and the kid was the only thing that made him smile. It was the worst winter we'd had. I'd a darned sight rather face winter alone out here than make a woman do it. I up and told the ranger so one day, and he hit me. We had it out up there at the pass—you remember, Kerwalt?"

The old man nodded.

"You blacked Ashford's eye. I reckon if me and Plumer hadn't got there, you'd been going down the Colorado feet first!"

Jansen nodded.

"D'you remember the spring? There was a kind o' green mist over the trees, and the ledges of the rock got green. There were a lot of blue jays—I've seen 'em flying along the face of the cañon like bits of sky dropped on wings.

"Along about the first of May John Ross came. He was after game, he said. He was a young fellow, city-bred. Handsome? You bet! Dressed rough, but wearing his things like a swell. Carried a gun and fishing tackle. That sort of a guy? Yep! Some men are horse thieves, some of 'em are plain sneak thieves, and some of 'em are wife thieves. Ross was one. I'd lay a tenner he'd steal any man's wife, given time an' fair chance. He started fishing in this little old stream of ours, an' he caught Elsie."

The youth rolled over on his elbow and grunted.

"Cut it out!" he said brusquely. "I know what's coming—she ran off and left Ashford, and he's kept the wolf. Oh, gee, of course—of course!"

The foreman grinned a dry grin.

"There's more to it than that, my son. Ross got Elsie in love—why not? The poor girl was crazy out here alone in this wild place. She forgot her kid, she forgot her husband. She and Ross used to sit up there on the ledge and hold hands, watching the sun set. We all knew it—all but Ashford. He wouldn't believe a thing against his wife. No one dared tell him, anyway—he'd have killed 'em. Elsie and Ross walked up the ledge, the ranger walked down, yet they never met. It went on all through the summer, and she got pretty again—seemed to bloom out like a rose. Ashford was teaching the kid to ride on his shoulder.

"Somehow the she-wolf didn't bother Elsie now, and she let her come for food. Ashford said the wolf had a litter up in the timber—he'd seen two cubs.

"By September it got very hot and dry. The grass looked singed, and there wasn't any water in the streams, so that the animals all came down to the river to drink. Ross was sick of it, but he wasn't through yet. He'd asked Elsie to run away with him."

The foreman stopped, leaned over, picked up his pipe, and tamped in some new tobacco.

"She went, of course!" mocked the young fellow.

Jansen lit his pipe.

"They were sitting out in the ledge in the moonlight.

"'I can't go East without you,' says he. 'Heaven above us, Elsie, I love you better than life!'

"'If Ashford hears you, he'll cut your heart out,' said Elsie; but she let her big eyes rest on him, and she shook her black hair down on her shoulders.

"Ross got down on his knees, kissing her hands.

"'You're going, Elsie—you're mine! This place—why, this place is a hell for a girl like you!'

"She shook her head, looking past him down the cañon.

"'I can't go,' says she. 'I'm married. I've got a child. I'm going to live here and—' and hear the wolves howl!' She dropped her head in her hands and sobbed. 'I wish I could die!' she wailed. 'I wish I could die! I will die if you go away, Rossie!'

"That settled it for him. He knew he'd won out. He came down the next morning and talked like a prince. He was going Tuesday, and he wanted a couple of horses. He took the teamsters out and give 'em drinks at the camp. The ranger had to go up the river Monday morning, and would get back somewhere before moonrise on Wednesday. Packer—he was foreman then—he comes to me Sunday night.

"'You going to let that damned fool go?' he says.

"I nodded. I wasn't ready to get measured up for my coffin—not then. Packer took a chew of tobacco and stared at me.

"'Rossie's going to carry her off on them two horses,' says he. 'I know that for sure.'

"'Why don't you tell Ashford?' says I.

"Packer turned pink. Ashford was coming along the trail, carrying his kid on his shoulder. The kid had his fists in his dad's hair, and was crowing to beat the band.

"'Hanged if I tell him!' said Packer.

"Nobody told him. He went off at sun-up on Monday, and Elsie stood in the door and waved him good-by. Ross was all-fired busy that day. As soon as the ranger was gone, he threw off the cloak. He paid

money for horses, for supplies, for things that would make it easy for a lady traveling fast to the railroad. There wasn't any bridge across the Colorado above Needles, California, so he'd have to keep the same side of the river as the ranger; but there wasn't one chance in ten thousand that they'd meet.

"Elsie didn't show up. We reckoned she was packing small and light. Some of us thought about the kid. Did she mean to take it along?"

"If she does," says Packer, "I'll rip the outfit open, and get it and keep it. She can't rob its daddy of the kid!"

"Then we found out that she'd asked Kerwalt here to watch the kid for her. She was going to leave her husband and her baby!"

"The gang laid off work at noon and watched a big fire in the timber. It had got the start of us in the dry grass, and it was burning now like all hell let loose. The wind was against it, so it wasn't coming our way. The camp was safe, and so was the ranger's house; but the heat of that fire scorched up the limestone bluff—you can see the mark on it now. We had to take the horses up the cañon. The smoke was choking two miles downstream, and the wild things were running out of the timber.

"We'd clean forgotten Ross till he came for the horses. The pair of 'em, Ross an' Elsie, were going at moonrise. Their trail was upstream, clear of the fire. Some of us wondered where in blazes the ranger was, for he must have seen the smoke. I reckon Ross thought so, too. He led the horses up the cañon and tethered 'em; then we saw him hit the trail to the house.

"It was light as day, between the moon and the fire. Kerwalt had the ranger's kid on his shoulder, watching the blaze. The gang was bound to keep him from his mother.

"Elsie hadn't slept for a week. She was all dressed to go, and she had her bag packed. It was going to be hard riding, but that girl could sit a bucking broncho. It was a hot night, and the smell of smoke was like cheese in the air. You could hear the wood crackle and snap, and the sparks went up like shower rockets.

"Elsie was in the door when Ross came up at a bound. He was sure of her now; but she was staring at the blaze in the timber, her eyes wide and her face white.

"Isn't it awful?" she cried, sucking in her breath with terror. "Rossie, I'm—I'm scared!"

"Forget it!" says he. "You're to ride with love to-night, and you're going East—East for keeps, my darling!"

"He caught her close, kissing her hair; but she shoved him off.

"What's that?" she gasped, pointing out at the open.

"Ross started. He thought it was her husband. It wasn't—it was the she-wolf. She had something in her mouth—something soft and dangling. Elsie stared at her, fascinated. She couldn't move a finger. Ross snorted.

"What's wrong? It's that old wolf, isn't it? Want me to kill her, Elsie? We haven't much time, but I'll kill her if you're afraid of her."

"Elsie caught his hand on its way to his hip pocket.

"You let her alone," she said. "She's carrying her cub. She's bringing it here—here to this house—for safety!"

"So she was. The wolf knew Ashford. She took that cub into the inclosure, dropped it, and ran back like a gray streak to the blazing timber.

"Come on!" said Ross. "We've got to go, Elsie!"

"She didn't answer him. She stood staring at the wolf. Like a shot, the gray beast sped straight into the fire. Elsie trembled, holding away her lover's arms.

"Wait!" she whispered. "Wait—I've got to know!"

"Know what?" He was angry. "Elsie, love, come!"

"He had her hands now. With that fire blazing, the ranger might come any time, and Ross didn't want to shoot him or be shot by him.

"Elsie!" he cried.

"She didn't hear him. She was staring at the timber. Out of it came the she-wolf—on fire. Sure as death, she was smoking, but she had the other cub in her jaws. Two or three yards from the fire she laid down and rolled over, to put out the sparks in her fur. Then she picked up the cub and came trotting straight past Ross and Elsie into the yard. She put the cub down alongside its brother and sat down, licking her burns.

"She's a game old girl! She's saved both her cubs," laughed Ross. "Now we can go—why, Elsie!"

"That last was a cry, for Elsie had pushed him away.

"I'm not going," she said. "Good night, Ross, and—and good-by!"

"Not going?" He caught her wrists and shook them, furious at the thought of failure. "Not going? What do you mean?" he cried.

"She dragged her hands away.

"That poor beast has taught me a lesson," she gasped. "I'm a wicked woman! A she-wolf risks death—death by fire—to save her cubs, an' I"—she sobbed, choking, wringing her hands—"I was going away with you! I was going to desert my child for you!"

"You're coming, too. You're coming right now!" he answered her. "Elsie, you're raving! What's the wolf to you? The horses are ready!"

"She stared at him wildly.

"Go away, John Ross!" she said bitterly. "Go away! That wolf's a better mother than I am! If God's looking down at us—the wolf and me—He knows she's the mother and I—I'm the beast!"

"Ross swore. It wasn't his way to be thwarted.

"Elsie, I'm going to kill that damned wolf," he said. "Then you'll forget it."

"Never, never! I'm going to my child!" she sobbed.

"She ran past him down into the cañon. The glare of the fire lighted her way. She found Kerwalt holding the kid, and she dropped down beside him, sobbing. She stayed there all night."

Jansen stopped, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and began to refill it slowly. No one spoke. The last rays of sunlight had slipped off the giant cliffs, and the

river below us was a black ribbon in the dusk.

"Ashford came home in the morning. He found two horses tethered in the trail. The fire had burned out in the timber, and only the tang of smoke was still in the air. He went up to his house, but it was empty. Elsie and the kid had gone down to the camp. Then he heard something whimpering in the yard, and went out there. It was the two wolf cubs trying to wake their mother. She and John Ross lay in a tangle on the ground. Ross had driven his knife into her and killed her, but she had died with her fangs deep in his throat. She had killed him. When he went at her she must have fought for her cubs, and she had died fighting. You remember that day, Kerwalt?"

Old Kerwalt grunted, going through the motion of rubbing his hurt elbow.

"I remember," he said. "Ashford come down to the camp like a crazy man, and Elsie told him the whole story."

Jansen nodded, lighting up his pipe again.

"She made a clean breast of it. They sent Ross's body home, and Kerwalt and Ashford buried the she-wolf. The ranger tried to raise the two cubs, but one of 'em died. You saw the other."

The young man raised himself on his elbow.

"What became of her—the ranger's wife? This woman up there now—she's his second wife, I suppose?"

Jansen smiled grimly.

"That's Elsie. He forgave her. He forgave her and took her home with the kid. There's no better wife and no better mother this side of the Rockies now."

EDITORIAL NOTE—This magazine and its readers have suffered a great loss in the tragic death of Edith Rathbone Brainerd, more widely known under her pen name of E. J. Rath. Mrs. Brainerd was the wife of Chauncey Corey Brainerd, the Washington correspondent of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, and she and her husband lost their lives together in the film theater disaster at the national capital on January 28. For fifteen years she had been a valued contributor to the Munsey periodicals, her last completed work being the very clever and amusing story, "The Dark Chapter," the final installment of which appeared in the February number of *MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*. Of her other novels the following have appeared in book form—"The Sixth Speed," "Too Many Crooks," "Good References," "Too Much Efficiency," "The River of Romance," "Mister 44," and "The Mantle of Silence." A dramatic version of "Too Much Efficiency," by Cyril Harcourt, has been produced in England, and "The Wreck," recently concluded in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly*, has been dramatized by Owen Davis and will soon go into rehearsal. Nearly every one of Mrs. Brainerd's stories has been filmed for leading American stars.

Judith of Bohemia*

A STORY OF ARTISTIC AND THEATRICAL LIFE IN LONDON

By Coralie Stanton and Heath Hosken

Authors of "Called to Judgment," "The Book of Ethel," "The Buried Torch," etc.

JUDITH GRANT is an artists' model in Soho, London's Bohemian quarter. Her dearest friend is Clarissa Morley, nicknamed Chummy, a girl whose mind has been unbalanced by the disappearance of the man she loved, Alan Steyne. When Alan returns, Judy hopes that his presence will restore her friend's memory; but Clarissa does not recognize him, and soon Alan falls in love with Judy. Then Clarissa has a severe illness. As she recovers, her memory comes back to her, and she rushes into Alan's arms, declaring her love.

Alan, however, vows to Judy that he loves only her; but she—although she finds, to her own horror, that she cannot help returning his affection—is loyal to her friend, and tells him that he is in honor bound to marry Clarissa.

Judy has other admirers. One is an old friend, an artist named Bastien Dumont. Another is Bruce Gideon, the millionaire patron of Vincent Stornaway, a fashionable painter for whom she is posing. Gideon promises her a career as a dancer, and in his ornate rooms on Mount Street she dances before M. Guarvenius, a famous Polish teacher, who undertakes to train her. The rich man offers to advance all the money she needs, but she prefers to earn her own living.

Unwilling as she is to accept favors from Gideon, she is highly indignant when Alan Steyne, secretly jealous, warns her against him, and she insists that the millionaire's interest in her is strictly a matter of business. She is still more bitterly angry with Gideon, however, when she chances to overhear a conversation between him and Stornaway, in which they speak of her as "not the sort of girl one could marry." The next time the rich man calls at her little rooms in Clive Street she drives him away and tells him to come there no more.

Alan has inherited a small fortune and a house in Scotland, and he and Clarissa are to be married soon. The time for Judy's début as a dancer is also near at hand.

XXV

"LET'S do something nice, Alan," said Chummy, when Steyne called for her, shortly before seven o'clock that evening.

She had telephoned to him, meanwhile, that Judy had accepted the invitation to dine with them.

"I've arranged to go back to my place," he answered. "We'll pick up Dumont, and I've asked Hylton to look in—he's my old school chum. You'll like him. He's just back from Persia, where he's building a railway. You haven't seen my room since the piano came in."

"That will be perfectly lovely, Alan," the girl said. "Judy has never seen your place at all. I'm sure it's the nicest in London!"

"And where shall we dine? You're looking awfully smart, Clarissa!"

Chummy was wearing a simple black

dress, but it brought out her lily fairness and showed off the lines of her wonderful figure, making her look like a long-limbed young goddess. A band of forget-me-not blue ribbon was threaded in and out of her hair, which shone like moonbeams in the frost. Her golden brown eyes warmed her face, and gave it the glow of life.

"What about that little restaurant you took me to lunch at the other day?" she suggested.

"The Rochemont? Yes, it's nice and quiet, and good food. We'll go there."

They called for Judy, who appeared all in yellow, with a brilliant orange sash and stockings, and gold tinsel shoes. She was in wild spirits, and the meal was a desperately merry one.

Afterward they went to fetch Bastien at the Café Turc. The girls waited outside in the cab while Alan went in. He came back not only with Dumont, but with Michael Stone and Tony Leigh, whom Judy

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greeted with exuberant affection. She affirmed that the champagne had gone to her head, but Chummy declared that she had only drunk one glass, so it was impossible.

Judy told them that if Bastien would go and fetch his fiddle she would dance for them at the studio. She said she had never felt so much like dancing in her life. This necessitated two cabs, and as another was called, Chummy got out of the first one and said to Steyne:

"You go on with Judy and Tony. Michael and I will drive with Bastien to get his violin, and we'll follow you."

Steyne seemed to hesitate for a moment; then he got into the cab. The driver, mistaking the intentions of the others, drove off at once before Tony Leigh had time to enter the vehicle. Alan leaned out of the window to stop the man, but Leigh gesticulated to the effect that he would follow with the others; so Judy and Alan were alone.

It was a short drive, and they hardly spoke. The girl's high spirits had suddenly deserted her. As she sat there, wrapped in her old black cloak, there was a little hardness in her face. The laughing, generous mouth was set, the violet eyes gazed fixedly out into the street. In the gloom of the cab's interior she was so white that the patches of paint on her cheeks looked almost black.

When they reached his abode, he did not touch her hand to help her out. In silence they mounted the stairs. Steyne was breathing heavily, as if with exertion. Judy stood like a little statue while he opened the door.

"Here is my room," he said.

She stepped in and looked around.

It was still very bare, but it had pleasing color, chiefly blue, in the curtains and the chair covers. There were heaps of books. The easels were at one end. From the pointed roof hung old brass lamps on chains. The floor was polished and waxed, and only a few small rugs lay on it. There was nothing valuable or rare, but the room gave a sense of freedom and space. On the wide window ledge were bowls of red and white peonies. On a little platform at one end was the small cottage piano that Steyne had lately bought—not that he could play or sing, but most of his friends could.

It was still light, but Alan switched on the bulbs in the old lamps, which gave an

effect of blue and yellow twilight, mingling with the rosy glow that still lingered over the river in the west.

"Would you like to see my little garden up on the roof?" he asked.

Judy shook her head.

"Not now. I want to look at this—please let me! It's so—nice!"

She gazed around her. Steyne went to a table standing against the wall, near the piano. Lifting napkins, he inspected sandwiches and cakes that were laid out.

Judy did not speak. Her eyes took in everything in the big room. She did not need to look at the figure behind her. Once before she had stood at the gate of the world's garden with Alan. Now she had lost the key, but the garden was still there.

Her little face was solemn. This room held everything that she wanted in the world. It seemed to her that, gazing on it for the first time, she was also taking an eternal farewell.

She walked quickly to the other end, and stood at one of the windows. Warehouses and factories on the other side of the river cut a jagged line into the clear sky. Seen over the bowls of red and white flowers, it made a wonderful frieze.

Judy was immensely receptive to natural beauty, although she had little taste in matters of art. She stood and caught her breath. Seen from behind, her hair made a ruddy aureole.

Steyne looked round, took a few steps, and was by her side.

"Judy!"

"Don't talk to me!" she implored. "It's so lovely here that I want to cry."

"Judy, they'll be here in a minute," Alan said breathlessly. "I must talk to you."

She looked up into his hard, tortured face and forced a mischievous smile to her lips.

"You want to lecture me again!" Her voice was so patently forced that it rang through the room like some one playing a false note on an instrument. "You're still worried about poor Mr. Punch!"

"No," he said harshly. "No—I've got beyond that. I've got to tell you, Judy—I can't do it. I can't marry Clarissa. It's no good!"

"You've got to!" She was just a little bunch of fierce, resentful anger. "Chummy's so happy!"

"I can't help it. Doesn't it matter to you that I'm in hell?"

"Not a bit! It's all those years. I saw her—I lived with her. She had no life at all. You took her life away with you. Now you've got to make up for it."

"I can't!"

"You must. Fix the day—get it over. It'll be all right. Max Dickbread is what you clever people call a cynic. I don't know what it means, but this morning he was talking about somebody he knew who'd married the wrong girl. And he said to me, 'In a year it won't make the slightest difference.' And I don't suppose it will."

"Judy, you know that's a lie!"

"I don't know that it is at all," she said dully.

"Anyhow, you've got to marry Chummy. You owe it to her."

He turned so that he faced her.

"I'm always hoping against hope that you'll see reason, and let me tell her the truth."

"Never—never—never!" She stamped her foot. "And I'll tell you another thing—I can't afford to let anything get on my nerves now. I've got to think of nothing but October. I can't lead old Guarvenius down after what he's done for me."

"Or Mr. Gideon!" exclaimed Steyne bitterly.

"Or Mr. Gideon," she repeated. She looked about her a little wildly. "But where are they? What's keeping them? They ought to have been here long ago."

The silence in the big room was oppressive. Suddenly Judy caught hold of Steyne's arm and shook it as if in violent anger.

"Oh, do be decent!" she said. "Don't make it so hard—so terribly hard!"

Her voice broke in a helpless sob. The young man looked down into her upturned face. His eyes had neither laughter nor passion in them. They were like a burned-out fire. Without a word he turned and walked out of the room.

At the same moment Judy's strained ears caught the sound of a taxicab stopping in the street below, and laughing voices were wafted up through the summer air.

They all came tumbling up the stairs. No one could be dull or depressed for a moment when Tony Leigh and Michael Stone were about. Bastien had his violin

case. At the door they had met Frank Hylton, Alan's school chum, a thin giant with a keen face, whose mahogany tan made his eyes, eyebrows, and hair look almost white. He was introduced to Judy, who promptly attached him to herself in her perfectly open and unashamed way.

"Judy is going to dance," announced Chummy, beaming with pride. "Judy, did Alan show you the other rooms, and his kitchen, and his garden?"

"No," Judy answered, tossing her bright head, as Dumont tuned up his violin. "I wanted to stay here. This room is lovely. I'll see the others later. You were a long time coming. What happened?"

"Bastien had forgotten his key, and we had to rouse his landlady."

"So like Bastien!" said Judy carelessly. "We thought you'd broken down."

She was skimming about the room, while the others mechanically disposed themselves to watch her dance.

There was a wide, low divan against the wall, at a right angle with the piano. Chummy sat on it between Tony Leigh and Hylton. Michael Stone sat on the floor, on some cushions, at the other end of the room. Alan picked up the rugs and threw them into a corner. Then he came and sat down beside Hylton.

"What's it going to be, Judy?" Michael Stone called out.

The girl, still wearing her shabby black cloak, danced up to Bastien, and, standing on tiptoe, whispered something to him. He nodded, and Alan wondered if it were only he who saw the pain in Dumont's eyes.

Judy ran to the door and called out to ask Steyne where the switches were. He told her, and she extinguished two of the three lamps, leaving the room in partial darkness.

Dumont burst into a gay, light, florid melody, reminiscent of Mozart in his most Italian style. It was clear and polished, like a string of gems. Dumont was quite a notable violinist, and but for the fact that one must be a veritable master to succeed publicly, he might have been heard of by the world.

The music went on for two or three minutes. Judy seemed to have disappeared; then, suddenly, she leaped into the middle of the room, like a firefly glittering on dark foliage at the coming of night.

Alan shut his eyes every now and then during the dance. There was no doubt

what it was—an Italian night, an orange grove under a hot moon, and that little vivid figure, now a firefly, now a half-human elf, and again a joyous maiden picking the golden fruit, reaching up, up, up to the highest boughs. It was all there—all in those nimble feet, in those thin arms, in that bright head.

He stared out of the windows. The English night was deepening, and it spread a curtain of deep blue. He looked back again, and there was all the charm and wonder of the south.

It was a very short dance. The golden feet began to move more slowly; the daring leaps were no more; the orange and yellow of Judy's dress ceased to be an incarnate flame. Languorously, gently, swaying like a tired flower, she moved toward the door to a magical waltz tune from Bastien's violin.

Alan could bear no more. Chummy pulled his sleeve and whispered rapturous praise.

The next moment Judy switched on the lights, ran across the room, and landed with a lightsome bound on Tony's knees. There was a burst of laughter—relief after the strain. Everybody cried out something at once.

"Wonderful! Judy, you've got them all beaten—every one of them!"

"Judy, you're a little liar when you say you've never been in Italy!"

"Judy darling, I've never had such a treat in my life!" This from Chummy.

Steyne didn't know what to say. He listened as his friend Hylton expressed himself a little awkwardly, but with unbounded admiration. Then, to test his own voice, he called out:

"Dumont, I had no idea you could play like that!"

"Neither had any of us," put in Chummy. "It's Judy who makes him do it!"

Dumont struck up a modern waltz, and they all started dancing—Hylton with Chummy, Tony Leigh and Michael Stone together. Alan found himself beside Judy, by one of the windows. He had fetched her cloak and put it round her shoulders.

"I couldn't bear to see you dance in front of a great vulgar crowd," he said beneath his breath.

"Hush!" she whispered, frightened at the passion in his voice. "I've got to dance—I simply must. You've no idea what it's like."

"It drives me mad!" he went on. "It will drive other men mad!"

His voice was reckless. Judy held her breath as Chummy and Hylton passed close to them.

"You mustn't talk like that," she said when they had gone by. "You must be crazy! Come and dance at once, and behave like other people."

He obeyed her, but the hands that held her might have been made of wood. He dared not realize that she was close to him, keeping step with him, a light, gossamer thing of perfect skill and grace. He stumbled heavily in his anguish, and she released herself.

"Clumsy!" she laughed. "I'm parched. For mercy's sake, get me something to drink!"

There was more dancing, and they ate the sandwiches and cakes, and drank lemonade, or vermouth, or cold broth.

Then Tony and Michael begged Judy to dance again.

"I'm dog-tired," she said; "but I don't mind, if it pleases you children."

The two artists were overcome with amazement, truth to tell. They could hardly believe that this was the Judy they had known for years. They had never appreciated her charm, although they had admired her steadfast care of poor Chummy; but this—this feather-light embodiment of sheer art, this fiery, seductive, languid, gay, irresistible creature—they felt that their eyes must be deceiving them. They were eager for her to dance again, so that they might make sure.

But just then the telephone bell rang out in the little lobby. Alan went out and came back quickly.

"You're wanted, Miss Grant," he said. Often in addressing her he used the formal name.

She went out, and Alan shut the door, so that whatever conversation she had should not be overheard. He went back and talked to Dumont about his music.

Judy was away a long time—or so it seemed. They all talked together, but at last there came a lull, prolonged out of nervousness. In it there was no sound of Judy's voice outside.

They waited; it seemed an interminable time. Then Alan opened the door and went out.

He found Judy standing beside the instrument. She had replaced the receiver.

She looked at him as if she did not know him. Her arms hung stiffly by her side. She was like a statue.

"Judy, what's the matter?" he whispered, careless whether those inside heard him or not.

She did not answer, but walked like an automaton before him into the big room. She stood in the middle and looked around at them all.

"Oh!" she said in a reedy voice. "A dreadful thing has happened! Old Guarvenius—dear old Guarvenius—has been run over in the street and killed. That was his housekeeper on the phone. He asked for me just before he died—in Charing Cross Hospital. She was there—they'd sent for her. She sent a messenger to the café, knowing I'm often there, and they told her where I was. Isn't it awful? He was such a dear old thing—like a father to me! Whenever he was pleased with me, he called me his bird. And now he's dead!"

Chummy went to Judy, put her arms about her, and tried to comfort her; but she was not to be comforted. She burst into bitter sobs before them all, without concealment and without shame.

They gave her the sympathy of silence. But in the midst of it Steyne's heart sent up a fiery burst of thankfulness, because, if her master were dead, Judy might never become a dancer, and might never be gazed upon by the eyes of the great vulgar world!

XXVI

"JUDY says she will never dance again."

"Rubbish!"

"She says she was actually dancing when M. Guarvenius died."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Dumont. "Wouldn't he have wanted her to be dancing?"

"He wanted to see her," said Chummy.

"I know; but she couldn't help it that they didn't find her in time. I call it rather morbid."

"She says her career is over. I think it's a pity myself, but Alan thinks it's right."

"You saw her dance. What do you think, Chummy?"

"I think she was perfectly wonderful. And so were you, Bastien. The way you played! It was a dream."

"I was nothing. It was all Judy. She is a great dancer."

"Of course."

"I understand Steyne's point of view," Dumont went on. "It's a man's. I have it myself to a certain extent. No man wants to see a woman in whom he's interested in the public eye."

"Oh, Bastien, that's old-fashioned! Men used to shut their women up in caves."

"I know. It's the old idea, and it's still there."

"But you, Bastien—you wouldn't want Judy not to become a dancer? And you're just as much interested in her as Alan is."

"Yes, just as much interested," he answered, with a sudden laugh; "but I think perhaps I've got more of the cursed artistic temperament. I think it would be a crime if Judy's art were lost to the world. Still, I understand Steyne, all the same."

"I think you're ridiculous, both of you," said Chummy stoutly. "You might just as well say I shouldn't paint."

"Oh, no, that's different, Chummy."

"How different?"

"Well, the world sees your work—it doesn't see you."

"Oh! It's because the world has to see Judy herself. And you men don't like it—even though she's nothing to you. At least, she's nothing to Alan."

"I told you it was the man's point of view," Dumont said, swallowing something in his throat.

"It's jealousy—dog-in-the-manger jealousy, Bastien," said Chummy; "on Alan's part, at any rate. Of course, I can't help knowing that you care for Judy, but you say you don't mind her dancing."

"That's because I'm cursed with the artistic temperament, and it gets the better of the man in me."

"Bastien," said Chummy earnestly, "I'm sure you'll win Judy's love in time."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. You're so faithful, and she is so fond of you."

"Have you noticed that?" he asked with sarcasm.

"Of course I have. And now you're getting on well and she's going to be famous. Some day you'll be a great pair!"

"And you, Chummy—when are you to be married?"

"Next month."

"Is the date fixed?"

"Not the actual day. I don't want to go away until something is settled about

Judy. I couldn't leave her; and we were going abroad at once."

It was just a week after the death of Guarvenius. He had been buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. Another grave for Judy to visit and tend! She had gone into deep mourning. She had canceled all her model work and spent her days in her own rooms.

Guarvenius had apparently had no family but a young nephew—a youth whose remarkable good looks were marred by unmistakable signs of dissipation. He had come over to London from Paris, and had taken charge of everything. In the absence of a will he was the sole heir. He shut up the dancing school and sold the lease of the house in Bloomsbury Square, with all the furniture and fittings, lock, stock, and barrel.

He was not interested in dancing as a high art. He did all his dancing at the Moulin Rouge and the Bal Bullier. He did not trouble himself about his late uncle's pupils at all. He only very reluctantly allowed the great Marie Flomena to choose a personal souvenir from the master's private belongings, and he was rude to Judy at the funeral; but, as she spoke no French, and he no English, it made no impression on her.

For more than ten days Judy saw nobody but Chummy. Apt to exaggerate everything, she behaved as if she had been left an inconsolable widow. She would discuss no plans for her future. Only once did she talk about anything but Guarvenius and his goodness to her, and that was when she asked her friend when she was to be married.

"We have postponed it, Judy darling," Chummy said. "I couldn't go away and leave you like this without knowing what you are going to do."

Then Judy spoke very decisively.

"That's all nonsense, Chummy! You know I shall be all right. I can go to work again as soon as I want to, and I shall when I've got over the shock. I could always get on the stage now. Anybody would give me a shop—I'm sure of that."

"But you said you were never going to dance again, Judy."

"I know I did; but that was after the first blow. I've been thinking since then. I feel sure that *he* would have wanted me to go on dancing. I think it was wrong to feel that everything was over. If I get on

and do well, he would have been proud of me, Chummy."

It sounded somewhat involved, but the sentiments were unimpeachable; only it was all so unlike Judy—this serious little person in black, with unpainted cheeks and eyes that appeared to be studying the problems of life.

"Of course, my career is done for," Judy went on. "I don't suppose I shall ever be a great dancer—not famous like Flomena. You want what dear M. Guarvenius described as the right atmosphere and surroundings. I shall never have a theater to myself, and a perfect orchestra, and all the advertisement that he was going to give me. Of course, he could have managed all that, and I was going to pay him back afterward."

"He had practically taken a theater for October, hadn't he, Judy?"

"Yes—the Haystack, and he had engaged the orchestra; but of course all that will go by the board. I shall have to make my way, like any other beginner; but you're not to worry about me, Chummy. I shall be all right. I sha'n't want for anything. You go and get married, and go abroad and have a lovely time."

"I suppose, Judy," said Chummy rather nervously, "you wouldn't come with us?"

"What an idea!" cried Judy, and laughed more like her old self.

"But afterward, Judy, when we come back—when we go to Scotland—you'll come and stay with us, won't you?"

"Oh, Lord, yes, if you'll ask me! There's nothing I'd like better. Just promise me, Chummy, first, that you won't put it off on account of me."

Chummy found it hard beyond belief to repeat this conversation to Alan. She managed to tell him that Judy was very much changed.

"She's so serious, Alan—you wouldn't know her."

"And you think she can look after herself, Clarissa?" the young man asked.

"Oh, yes, of course she can. She always has."

"Then you don't think it necessary to postpone our wedding any longer?"

"No, Alan—not on that account."

Steine said nothing. There was no other account. He knew that. It had come to the point. It was now the end of the first week in August. He had consulted the girl about the date of the wed-

ding a day or two ago, and she had suggested the seventeenth, her birthday. It must be settled definitely now. There was no going back. Her preparations were made. He had none to make.

The time had come for him to settle his debt, to pay for that more than seven-years-old mistake.

He nerved himself, and they discussed details. There was plenty of time to give orders for the other rooms in Westminster to be prepared before they came back. They would write from abroad. Perhaps Clarissa would pick up some Italian furniture. There were a small sitting room for her and another bedroom, and also a maid's room, to be arranged. Clarissa could think of no more ideal home.

"Before we go, Alan, we must make Judy spend a day with us. I'm still a little worried about her. You see, she's alone a great deal now, and Clara Jenks is so busy. Shall we go into the country and have a really nice day? I'll make her come."

"Yes," he agreed. "I'll hire a car—there's not room enough in mine."

"That will be lovely!"

Chummy was radiant. Alan wondered at her unselfishness. He wondered how she had ever come to believe that he loved her; and he wondered what in her secret heart she thought of him as a lover now.

XXVII

"You will come, won't you, Judy?" Chummy asked, her eyes alight with affection, her whole being aglow with the thought of the wonderful life that was opening out before her. "Just one day before we start off, Alan and I!"

"Of course I'll come," Judy answered. "It sounds lovely. A whole day in the country, a motor car, a picnic lunch, and a dinner and a play to end up with! Why, sweet, I haven't done a single thing since dear old Guarvenius died!"

Judy's manner rather suggested that her period of passionate mourning had been a little too much for her.

"Then it's to-morrow, if it's fine," said Chummy. "We'll call for you at ten o'clock, if that isn't too early—we want to go a long way, into the real country."

"Splendid! And you're really to be married—when is it?"

"A week from to-day," said Clarissa, blushing.

"And I'm not asked to the wedding?"

Chummy went still redder.

"It's Alan, Judy darling. He somehow doesn't want to ask anybody—not a soul."

"I quite understand," Judy said. "If a thing's going to be quiet, it had much better be dead quiet. And you see, all the boys would want to come."

"I know; but I should have loved you to be there."

"Never mind, angel. I should be no earthly good. I should weep, and your Alan would hate me. And—well, I think he's quite right. Well, to-morrow we'll have a good time. And one day just before you're married we'll have a little time all to ourselves, you and I—lunch at Ginnori's, and a talk about the good old days—a regular bachelor good-by party, Chummy dear!"

Judy was decidedly more like herself, and Clarissa, now about to enter the very innermost circle of happiness, was elated and transfigured, so that she had no fears either for herself or for her beloved little friend. The future of Judy was as rosy as her own. She would have the world at her feet, and then in time she would find love, and she would know that it is the greatest thing of all.

The day in the country was a great success. From Chummy's point of view, it was perfect.

They drove down to a far corner of Hampshire, where there was a sweeping line of great bare downs. They climbed one of them, leaving the car at the bottom, and Alan carrying the luncheon basket. On the top they were rewarded by a grand view and a sweet, cool breeze that blew from the sea. They ate and drank like schoolboys. Judy was entranced by the wide, open spaces, and danced about like a child of ten.

Then they laid themselves down on the springy, scented turf, and smoked and talked—at least, Judy and Chummy talked. They strolled about and picked flowers, made a wide circle of the summit of the downs, and finally reached the car again, scrambling down a steep hillside, exhausted with laughter and exercise and fresh air.

A cup of tea at a roadside inn refreshed them, and then came the steady, humming ride back to town, their feet on the debris of the basket, their laps full of flowers,

their faces burned and roughened by wind and sun.

Judy was dropped at her rooms after six o'clock, and Alan and Chummy made an appointment to fetch her at half past seven for the dinner and music hall, which were to make a fitting end to this gala day.

It was a little after half past seven when Steyne arrived.

Judy's rooms were on the top floor of the little house. The front sitting room was very scrappily furnished, but Judy had put up some little pictures that the boys at the café had given her, and there was a gaily striped Como rug thrown over the hard couch. Far more color was provided by a mass of exquisite flowers from hot-house and garden—a veritable medley of roses, carnations, lilies, and all the variegated splendor of the August border. They had evidently been thrown into basins and jugs pell-mell, and their scent made the atmosphere of the little room heavy with sweetness.

Judy came into the room, while Alan stood at the window, glowering down into the street.

"Where is Chummy?" she asked.

"I expected to find her here," he answered. "We said half past seven. I came straight here. I am a little late."

"She won't be many minutes," Judy said carelessly. "What a lovely day we had! What do you think of my room?"

"Where do all these flowers come from?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Nonsense, Judy! Tell me, are they from Gideon?"

"I tell you I don't know; but I shouldn't be surprised. They come every few days, and there's no name. Only Mr. Gideon hasn't any country house in England, and aren't they garden flowers?"

"Some of them," said Steyne roughly. "Where is Gideon?"

"Abroad somewhere—in France, where he goes to drink waters to reduce his fat, I think."

"When did you last see him?"

"I haven't seen him since dear M. Guarvenius died," Judy answered.

"Didn't he try to see you?"

"He did, if you want to know; but I can't see why you—"

"Oh, yes, Judy, you can see!" said Steyne recklessly. "You know perfectly well that I'm madly jealous of the brute!"

"I think it's very strange of you to talk like that when you're going to be married in a day or two. Why do you want to spoil this nice day?"

Steyne turned and looked at her.

She wore a little black dress all but sleeveless, as was her wonted garb. Around her slender waist was a sash of fussy tulle, ending in a big bow at one side. She was very pale. The flowerlike face, the bright hair, and the curl of the lips were more than Alan could stand.

He had given her up—yes, he had given her up once and for all on that night in his studio, when she had begged him not to make it so hard for her; and he was going to marry Clarissa Morley in a day or two. But just now, at this moment, in her flower-scented room, after a day in Judy's company, drinking in her presence, absorbing all her maddening variety, he was not master of himself.

Just once more—once more!

He strode up to her and took her hands.

"Judy, this is good-by," he said.

"Yes," she breathed. "It is good-by!"

"You are making me do it. It's your fault. You insist on my marrying Clarissa. You insist on my leaving you all alone in the world without any one to look after you."

"I can look after myself."

"Perhaps; but I want you to know that it's your fault, your doing. Good-by, Judy!"

"Good-by!"

She breathed faintly. Her pallor was ghastly. She swayed toward him, and the next moment she was in his arms.

"Don't forget," he said fiercely, "you are making me do this. I love you and you love me. I don't love Clarissa. I know I ought to tell her the truth. You won't let me. Whatever happens, it's your fault!"

"Oh, don't—don't!" she murmured, on the point of collapse.

Their lips met. All the world was forgotten in that agonizing farewell.

"Good-by, Judy—good-by!"

"Good-by, Alan—oh, dear, dear love, good-by!"

Neither of them noticed that the door was pushed open an inch or two. Alan did not know that he had left it ajar; nor were they aware that Clarissa was standing there in the doorway, her lovely face set into a mask of incredulous wonder, her

golden brown eyes half-closed, as if in an instinctive effort not to see.

XXVIII

SOME five minutes later Clarissa Morley slowly reascended the stairs. She had descended them swiftly and silently, and stood at the bottom like a graven image, with her hands clenched at her side.

What gave her strength to play the part she did she never knew. This time she rapped at the door and called out Judy's name. She found Judy and Alan waiting for her. Judy was laughing at something Alan had just said. Steyne gave her a smile of cordial welcome.

"Late, Clarissa!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I know," she answered.

She wondered in an impersonal way what they thought of her voice, her face, her whole bearing—those two who had just been in each other's arms, bidding each other good-by eternally, with tears and anguish, with passionate despair—those two whom she had seen, but who had not seen her. They played their parts well, too.

Life, after all, was a comedy. On with the show! A single broken leg will not stop a circus. Why should a single broken heart put a spoke in the great wheel of life?

They spent a merry evening, a fitting ending to a gala day.

Two mornings later Steyne received a little note from Clarissa, asking him to come to see her at Willborough Avenue. She did not name any time, and Steyne waited until noon, thinking she might want him to take her out to lunch.

He found her dressed for the street, her fair hair escaping picturesquely from under a soft black hat. Her high-bred, sensitive face was very pale, but her eyes lit up her features with the amazing vitality that she had acquired since her recovery.

"Alan," she began at once, "I asked you here because I want to talk to you alone. I'm afraid I shall sound very silly and as if I didn't know my own mind, but I've—well, I've come to the conclusion that I don't want to be married."

The young man caught at the suggestion as a drowning man catches at a straw.

"You mean you want to postpone it again, Clarissa? I suppose it's on account of Judy. You're not quite happy about her, are you?"

"No, Alan," she answered slowly. "I don't mean that. I mean that I don't want to be married at all."

"You don't—want—" He broke off in sheer amazement.

"Yes. I know it sounds perfectly ridiculous. I quite expect you to think I'm mad."

"But, Clarissa, is there any reason?" he asked.

"Not any reason that sounds good enough," the girl said, forcing herself to smile. "The fact is, Alan, I'm awfully afraid I'm still a little queer at times. It's been unreal to me for a long time, the thought that I was going to be your wife." That was true enough. It had seemed too good, too wonderful, too blessed, even to imagine. "I ought to have told you this before."

"Clarissa, I don't understand. Is it anything lacking in me? Have I done anything to hurt you?"

She smiled again, with all that wonderful fidelity of devotion in her eyes.

"No, Alan, no. I am as fond of you as ever—in a way. You have been everything that is dear and good—simply everything; and I should hate to think that I was hurting you—"

"But, of course, you are hurting me!" he interrupted.

The words were purely mechanical. He was playing a part, just as she was; only he did not know that she knew the truth.

"Please, Alan, don't be angry with me," she went on gently. "I'm awfully sick with myself, but I really want to settle down to work more than I want anything else in the world."

"You care for your career more than you do for me?"

Her lips trembled a little. He believed that she had changed her mind. He was glad, oh, but she knew how glad he was! He loved Judy. He must have learned to love Judy while she was out of her senses; and when she recovered, he felt himself in honor bound to her.

It was such a simple story. They were both loyal to her—he and Judy. They would have remained loyal to the end.

She read Steyne aright. He thought she was speaking the simple truth. He was too much overjoyed to question what she said.

He was free—that was his paramount thought. He was not to be asked to enter

into an unnatural union that would have destroyed his soul. He would not have to perjure himself every day to a woman who loved him.

"I suppose I do put my career first," Clarissa said.

Then Alan Steyne made a very masculine remark.

"You're making me look very foolish, Clarissa!"

At that she laughed. She wondered that her laughter did not sound wild to him.

"I'm sorry, Alan; but I hope we shall still stay friends."

Something in her voice and glance seemed to pierce his denseness.

"Are you perfectly sure?" he asked with a feverish earnestness. "I can't help thinking that I've done something."

"You've done nothing, Alan, nothing—believe me."

He looked into her clear eyes, which were smiling in order to hide her broken heart; and he believed her because he wanted to believe.

Two days later was to have been Chummy's wedding day.

On the afternoon of the day before, she met Judy as she was going out of her door, on her way to seek another lodging. The time had come when she must get some kind of a studio, where she could work. When she had found it, she was going to move her few belongings into it and then go away for two or three weeks. She had written to a tiny fishing hamlet in Cornwall. She wanted to be near the sea. Then she was coming back to work—to work harder than any woman had ever worked before.

Her work must justify what she had said to Alan. Her work was her sheet anchor now. It was all she had.

Judy held out a great bunch of flowers wrapped in tissue paper.

"I was just bringing these to you," she said. "I want to kiss you and say good-bye! To-morrow's the great day—and you're off into the big world! And little Judy will be all alone."

"No, Judy—it's all off," said Chummy cheerfully.

She felt uneasy. This was not like talking to a man.

"Off!" gasped Judy. "You mean you've been so silly—you've put it off again because of me? Chummy, you make

me angry. Didn't I tell you I was perfectly well able to look after myself?"

"No—off for good, Judy dear. I found that I didn't want to marry Alan after all."

"Rubbish!" cried Judy tempestuously. "Where is he?"

"He went over to Paris yesterday. You see, I left it so late. He said he couldn't help feeling a little foolish. Men are like that, I think. I expect he thought he'd get laughed at."

Judy suddenly laughed uproariously.

"Oh, Chummy, how ridiculous you are! I suppose it means that you and Alan have had a tiff?"

"No, Judy—no." Chummy was desperate. "I don't care for Alan enough to marry him. I find I care more for my work. We're going to be great friends, of course, all the same. He quite understands. He doesn't want a—a wife who puts her painting first. He's gone to Paris and I'm going to the sea, and when we come back we'll all be jolly again together, just as we used to be."

Judy stared at Clarissa very hard.

"Well, I'm blown!" she said.

Chummy must have been a wonderful actress. For the moment she quite deceived her friend. Judy was thunder-struck. She lost the power of speech. She left her flowers in her hands and went away.

But she was not really convinced.

"There's something in this," she said to herself an hour or so later. "What can it be? If Chummy didn't worship the ground he trod on, then I ought to be in Bedlam!"

But for the time being she could do nothing but wonder.

She had a note from Chummy, saying that she had found a convenient studio and another room near Bastien. She had moved her things, and she was off to Cornwall the next day.

From Steyne Judy heard nothing at all.

A week later she received a letter that excited her very much, although she little guessed what bearing it was destined to have on the next few months of her life.

XXIX

THE letter was from a stranger to Judy. It was typewritten on plain, thick note-paper, with the address "17a Linden Lane, E. C.," stamped on it. She could not make out the signature. She could read "Richard S.," but of the last name she could

only decipher the first letter, a W. The letter read thus:

DEAR MADAM:

Having known the late Vladimir Guarvenius, and being aware of his interest in your career, I venture to ask whether you would be good enough to call on me here any afternoon between four and six o'clock, as I have a proposition to place before you.

Yours respectfully—

Then came the signature that Judy could not read.

She determined to go to Linden Lane on the very same day. The name of her dead master was an immediate passport to her implicit confidence. It entirely overcame the instinctive suspicion that town-bred people harbor of all strangers.

She dressed herself in deep black, the outward sign of her loyalty to the man who had failed her only in his death, and who had taught her everything she knew. She made the journey to the city in an omnibus, and found Linden Lane a broad and busy thoroughfare which entirely belied its name. The number she sought proved to be in a handsome arcade.

She found a liveried lift attendant, and showed him the letter. He informed her that the writer's name was Wyon. He took her up to the third floor, and she saw all around her evidences of wealth and prosperity, such as deep pile carpets, much polished woodwork and plate glass, and gilded bronze fittings.

On a mahogany door she saw a small brass plate bearing the name "Richard S. Wyon." Going in, she found a large office tenanted by four clerks—two men and two very smart young women. Her inquiry produced an older man from an inner room, who disappeared for a moment, and then ushered her through two smaller offices into a large, handsomely furnished apartment that might have been a library but for maps of South Africa and the United States that hung on one of the walls, and some letter-filing cabinets and a Stock Exchange tape machine.

A small, slenderly built man of about sixty rose from a huge desk and came toward her. Her general impression was that he was good-looking in a rather effeminate way, and exceedingly well dressed. He had small hands and feet, sleek gray hair, and a thin, well-shaped mouth which, when opened, revealed a particularly white and faultless set of teeth. He wore a cer-

tain amount of very discreet jewelry, such as platinum cuff links set with small pearls.

He had a very kind smile, Judy noticed, as he held out his hand.

"This is indeed charming of you, Miss Grant," he said. "I hardly expected you to come so promptly."

"I'd go anywhere to see a friend of M. Guarvenius," Judy said. "Did you really know him very well?"

This was the only subject that interested her.

"I did not know him very intimately," Mr. Wyon replied. He had a very pleasant, refined voice, and spoke with great emphasis and something of a dramatic effect. Later on, Judy noticed that he used his hands a great deal, like a foreigner. There was altogether something of the stage about the little man. "But," he went on, "I had a great admiration for Vladimir Guarvenius, and the most complete confidence in his judgment. That is why I asked you to come here, my dear young lady. I wanted to talk to you about your future."

Judy started. Somehow this was the last thing she had expected. She had come with the idea in her generous heart of talking about her late master with a friend of his, of telling all his goodness to her, and then going away again. She would have poured out her soul to the veriest stranger about Guarvenius.

"Oh!" she said rather sharply. "I don't think there's much to talk about; but how did you hear about me? Was it from M. Guarvenius?"

"He did mention you, of course," answered Mr. Wyon; "but I have heard more about you from Mme. Flomena, who is also a friend of mine."

"Oh, she's been awfully kind!" exclaimed the girl, understanding now that this funny, rather dried-up little man was the kind of person who likes to mix with the artistic world.

"She thinks very highly of you, Miss Grant," he said emphatically. "And now let me come to the point. I understand that you have no private means, and that Guarvenius was going to arrange for your debut. His sad death must have made a difference to you."

"Of course it did—all the difference in the world!"

"Though I am convinced that your own prospects were the last thing you thought

of, Miss Grant. Now, I am a business man, and this is a business proposition—"

"Stop a moment!" she interrupted. "Who gave you my address? Your letter was forwarded from Willborough Avenue, where I used to live."

"A Miss Graham procured your address for me," Mr. Wyon explained. "She was also a pupil of Guarvenius, and she got it, I think, from a lady named Miss Jenks."

"Oh, I see! Well, what's it all about?"

Judy was on her guard to a certain extent, although the man inspired her with confidence.

"As I say, it is purely a business proposition," said Mr. Wyon, regarding her with his ingratiating smile. "I have a theater, Miss Grant—the Monopole. I do not exactly own it, but I have a large interest in it—a controlling interest, I may say. Now I am prepared to undertake what my friend Guarvenius was going to do—to arrange for your début at my theater, and to provide you with everything that is necessary, exactly as he would have done."

"But you don't know anything about me!" she cried.

"I have perfect confidence in Guarvenius's judgment."

"You've never seen me dance."

"That is quite unnecessary. You understand, I am not an artist—I am a business man."

"Are you very rich? And what is your business?"

Mr. Wyon smiled his delicate smile.

"I am interested in several things," he answered. "Diamonds, for one, and oil and coal. I don't call myself rich, exactly; but you can trust me to carry out what I propose."

Judy flushed.

"I suppose I'm rude," she said; "but this is a surprise. I don't know you from Adam. Why should you want to do this for me?"

"I have told you, my dear young lady," he said. "The conditions will be exactly the same. When you are well launched in your career, we will adjust our business relations. I shall be amply repaid. There is plenty of room for a dancer of genius. I will engage as your manager a man of the highest reputation—Gaston North. You can trust me to advertise adequately. My theater is a suitable setting for such art as yours, and we will have a good orchestra.

When I do a thing, I believe in doing it well."

"I don't know what to say," Judy said.

"Think it over, Miss Grant. Take a few days. When had poor Guarvenius planned your début?"

"In October."

"Well, we could manage it by then. You could start rehearsing at once. The theater is empty, as it happens. I will get the electricians and the scene-painters at work at once. But take your time to think it over, Miss Grant."

"It's not time I want," she said, with a laugh that sounded a little wild, for the delirium of ambition was creeping into her blood again. "I suppose we should have a contract. I should probably have to sign something."

"Not at all necessary, Miss Grant. I am not afraid that you'll cheat me. When you are well established, you will give me back the money I have spent. That's all I want."

"But—I might fail."

"Then I'll bear the loss, just as Guarvenius would have done."

"You must have thought a lot of him," she said with a deep sigh.

Mr. Wyon repeated what he had said before.

"I have the most complete faith in his judgment. Then you accept?"

"Yes, rather! And I'm greatly obliged to you, Mr. Wyon. But for this I'd have had to take on any shop I could get."

"It would have been a shame," he said emphatically. "I'm very glad you have consented to my proposal. You must meet Gaston North at once, and arrange with him about the music, and your costumes, and all that you need. We must have the most expert advice. Perhaps you will give me the pleasure of lunching with me tomorrow—at the theater. I have a little room there, and we can have some food sent in from a restaurant near by. I shall expect you, then—at half past one."

Judy shook hands with the little man like a person in a dream. When she had gone, Mr. Wyon stood, gazing at the door, with a look of enlightenment on his face.

"The description suits her down to the ground," he told himself. "'A thorny little person!' A very thorny little person indeed!"

Judy spent the following ten days in a whirl, and met more people than she had

ever met in her life before. She was what she called "completely dotty"—that is to say, confused and wildly excited, keeping only a clear grip on the essentials of her work. In that respect, like all true artists, little Judy Grant was eminently, almost savagely, practical. At any rate, other people sometimes found her savage when they tried to interfere with her work.

She received a post card and a letter from Chummy, from Batten's Bay, in Cornwall. She answered neither of these. She heard nothing from Alan Steyne. She would not allow herself to think about him at all.

One evening, crossing Willborough Avenue on her way to her lodgings, she met Bastien Dumont. She gave him a brilliant smile.

"Why, Bastien, I suppose you thought I was dead!" she cried.

"Nothing of the sort," he answered roughly. "Don't I hear you talked about every minute of the day? I can't open a newspaper without seeing your name. You're in for a boom, Judy—a real one this time! Who is it that's taken you up—that Gideon fellow?"

Judy looked at him with supreme scorn.

"Thank you, Bastien—I'm not taking any insults," she said. "I have not seen Mr. Gideon for weeks. I don't know where he is."

"Then who's backing you?"

"A friend of M. Guarvenius's. It is purely a business proposition," she added with immense dignity.

"The Monopole—that's where you're coming out. But who's doing it all?"

"Mr. Wyon—the gentleman who owns the theater."

"Oh, that crank!" cried Dumont, in evident relief.

"Why do you call Mr. Wyon a crank?" she asked.

"Oh, everybody knows he is! Always up to some extraordinary game!"

"Thank you, Bastien!"

"Judy, don't be cross! I know you're going to make a terrific hit. Nobody knows it better than I do. I say, you never come to the café now."

"I never have time."

"Come along now."

"I'll come and have some food at Gironi's, if you like," she answered. "I'm ravenous."

He assented eagerly.

Judy was shabbier even than usual, and there was an unnatural light in her eyes. She ate silently and voraciously. Dumont had had his dinner, and watched her drinking Chianti diluted with mineral water and lemon juice. It was suffocatingly hot in the restaurant.

When Judy began to talk, she told him everything with perfect frankness. He was still her best friend, the one person on whom she could always rely. She made that quite clear. She had made no new friends among the people she was now associated with. Mr. Wyon was very kind, but old. He was just a business man. He believed in her because Guarvenius had believed in her. She had only seen him three times in all.

Her manager, Gaston North, was a very silent individual. He was very ugly, red-haired and freckled, with a ginger mustache and horrid teeth. She thought he must go to bed with his pipe in his mouth.

He was wonderful at his job, however. He knew everything about scene-painting and almost everything about music. The conductor of the orchestra was a young Hungarian, blind in one eye. He made his men play the most heavenly music.

"Not that it's really any better than yours, Bastien," she added generously. "I did enjoy dancing to your fiddle that night at Mr. Steyne's."

This brought Bastien back to personal matters. While he watched her animated face, all the old misery throbbed in his heart and hammered in his brain.

"Judy, is everybody mad?" he asked. "Of course you know that Chummy didn't marry Steyne?"

"Of course I do."

"What did you make of it? Where is he now?"

"He went to Paris—so Chummy told me. She is in Cornwall."

"Yes, I knew that."

"Darling Chummy, she's written to me and I've never answered her. What a pig I am! I must write to-night."

"What do you make of it, Judy?"

"Oh, Bastien, I don't know. Chummy always tells the truth—you know that. She said she found out that she liked her work better than she did Mr. Steyne."

"Well, I don't believe it, Judy. There must have been something else."

Judy leaned across the table, her eyes big with a feverish question.

"What do you mean, Bastien? What else? What do you know?"

"I oughtn't to tell, I suppose," the young man said rather unwillingly. "It seems mean. She's not here, and she might hate anybody to know."

"Would Chummy hate me to know anything?" asked Judy reproachfully.

"No—not you, Judy," he said quickly. "Of course not you. Well, you know she's taken a studio in a building near mine, and a little bedroom, and a funny little galley just off the stairs, with a gas ring and a sink. Before she went to Cornwall she just told me that she wasn't going to be married. She didn't explain, and somehow I didn't like to ask her. She moved her things in and asked me to keep an eye on them while she was away. There is no housekeeper in the building, and she was going to leave me the key. Well, not to make it too long, I mistook the day she said she was going, and, not receiving the key, I went round to inquire. The door of her studio was open, and it looked empty, so I went in. She wasn't in there, but I looked through the door of the other little room, and there she stood. I oughtn't to have looked, but I couldn't help myself. She had her back to me. In her hand she held a small photograph, in a kind of miniature frame—"

Judy nodded, catching her breath.

"His—Mr. Steyne's—I know! He gave her the frame not long ago."

"I recognized it," Dumont went on, "because she had shown it to me at the café—I suppose it was the day he gave it to her. Well, Judy, she was looking at it, holding it in her hand. Then she stretched out her arms wide and stood like that for a moment, and then she clasped her hands together and bowed her head. Then she kissed the photograph—kissed it over and over again. I don't know how I got away, I was so upset; but, thank Heaven, I did get away before she saw me. Now, Judy, I ask you, would she have acted like that if she didn't care for the chap?"

Judy said nothing. She sat with her chin in one hand, the fingers of the other drumming on the table.

"Judy, do you think he really cares for her?" Dumont went on.

"Of course Alan cares for Chummy! Don't be a fool, Bastien!" replied Judy.

"It just occurred to me. You know what kind of a girl Chummy is—one of the

world's very best. It occurred to me that it was just possible she had found out that he didn't care for her, and she had made it up about not wanting to be married."

Judy looked at him with a thunderstorm face.

"Bastien, you're a perfect goose!" she said angrily. "It must have been a quarrel. They'll make it up when they come back. I wish you hadn't told me!"

When she got back to her rooms, she sat by her window with a very set little face.

She was wondering. Was it possible that Chummy had guessed something? Had Alan been so foolish, so wicked, as ever to let her see for a second that he did not care for her? Oh, no, of course he couldn't! It was impossible that Chummy had guessed. That would be too great a calamity to contemplate; but why, then, had she decided not to be married?

XXX

It was a week before the great day of Judy's first performance at the Monopole Theater. Everything was ready. Gaston North, Judy's silent manager, professed himself quite satisfied. It was a good thing she had such unemotional people to deal with. Even the Hungarian conductor, passionately full of temperament though he was, never let enthusiasm get the upper hand of discipline. He was too much of an artist for that.

Judy was keeping her own name. Already it stared at her in big letters on billboards. The Monopole was plastered with it—"Judy Grant." It looked so strange to her!

Gaston North, the manager, had been against it. His experience told him that the British public preferred a foreign name. Judy really didn't care one way or the other. It was Mr. Wyon who had unexpectedly pronounced in favor of plain "Judy Grant"; and, as he was putting up the money, he naturally had the casting vote.

Judy had not seen Bruce Gideon since the day when she drove him away from her rooms; but one afternoon, as she was on her way home after trying on some costumes, she came face to face with him in Trafalgar Square.

Gideon congratulated her warmly. He looked in better health, a trifle less puffy. He told her he had been walking nearly twenty miles a day.

"I came back to find your name all over the place," he said, "and the papers full of you."

"I have been very lucky," she replied.

"And all on your own, too!"

"Not quite that, Mr. Punch."

Her manner appeared to embolden him.

"I wonder if you will lunch with me tomorrow? Could you find time? I should like to hear all about it."

"Thanks," she said; "but make it dinner, will you? I never eat lunch now."

Time and place were arranged. Gideon could not help showing that he was a trifle astonished at her amiability.

When she turned up at the restaurant, his quick eye noted that she was differently dressed. It must be confessed that her clothes had always looked as if they had come out of a ragbag, however well they became her. She had now seen the advisability of acquiring a few gowns, hats, and coats for ordinary wear, as well as her stage costumes. As she had *carte blanche*, the thing was easy enough; but she had been by no means extravagant. The habit of long penury is hard to break, and Judy never really cared for clothes. What she cared for was color. She also never cared for money—as money. A less mercenary little person never lived.

That night she wore a gown of violent blue, with gold cords about the waist, and rather a full skirt. It suited her amazingly, because it subdued her too brightly colored face, brought out all the red glitter in her hair, and made her eyes look mysteriously dark. She was altogether irresistible. Gideon would not have needed his strong and desperate passion for her to find her enchanting that night.

She was like a flower—painted, true, but exquisite—something to marvel at, with the child, the artist, and the woman all battling in her face.

Judy ate with appetite. She had got into very regular habits, and she enjoyed the good things of life when her day's work was over. Of late she had not overtired herself. Now that the great night was so near, she had been obliged to drop her work as a model. Her landlady was giving her credit, and Mr. Wyon had insisted on her taking a certain sum of money for her immediate needs.

Mr. Wyon was her chief subject of conversation. Gideon admitted that she had been very fortunate in coming across him.

"But still, Miss Judy," he added, "I have cause to be jealous. You were willing to take the help of this perfect stranger; yet you absolutely refused to take anything from me."

Her eyes glittered. She put out some prickles.

"He was M. Guarvenius's friend," she said.

"But so was I," argued Gideon.

"It's different," she said. "His being quite a stranger made it different."

"I see!"

Gideon regarded her with a smile that just lifted the corners of his querulous lips, and made him look not so much coarse as ironical.

"And he is simply a business man. He says so."

"I see! And you like this Mr. Wyon?"

"Oh, yes—he is very kind; but I hardly know him. I've been doing nothing but work."

"And you trust him?"

"Of course. Is he not a friend of M. Guarvenius?"

"You have said that before, Miss Judy."

She would not stay more than a few minutes after they had finished. She had to keep very early hours, she told him.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked, as his car stopped at her door.

She had allowed him to drive her home without a protest.

"Oh, not until it's over," she answered lightly. "I am not going anywhere. This is the last time. That was a good dinner, and I was hungry. Good night, Mr. Punch!"

"I have a box at the theater for the first night," he said. "Shall I bring a crowd?"

"Rather! I want it to be a success. The more the merrier!"

The man's voice fell a tone or two.

"I'd rather sit in the box alone and watch you."

"How silly!" she laughed. "I want as many people as I can get."

She shook hands with him. He made a movement toward her, but stopped himself.

She ran into the house. She did not see his eyes following her. He had seemed much more what she called "sensible." She did not know that absence had changed her from desirable into indispensable, and that his former covetous greed for her had become the insatiable hunger of a starving man.

She had, indeed, dismissed him from her thoughts. Her purpose was still there, but it was dormant. Everything was swallowed up in her work, in her debut, which was becoming more and more of an ordeal every day, although she would have roundly snubbed anybody who suggested it. Bruce Gideon took a very back seat.

As for her purpose, time enough to think of that again when she knew whether she was going to succeed or fail.

Meanwhile, arrived in his Mount Street flat, Gideon poured himself out a drink, lit a cigar, and sat down to read the evening newspaper. There was much about Judy Grant in it. Mr. Wyon had secured the best press agent in London for his campaign.

Judy Grant! The name had a fascination. It was so plain and simple, yet it conjured up a vision of brightness and girlhood and maddening charm.

Gideon read what was written about her with a slow smile.

"She likes Mr. Wyon," he said to himself. "She thinks him more businesslike than kind. I'd no idea that little Dicky Wyon was such a clever chap!"

XXXI

JUDY had got stalls for Bastien and Tony Leigh and Michael Stone. She would have filled the stalls if she had not been checked. She bowed over the box-office manager in their first interview, but he had to explain that the Monopole was not a philanthropic institution.

However, Judy was full of niceties. Dan, of the Café Turc, had a seat in the first row of the upper circle, and scattered about the cheaper parts were two or three people whom Judy absolutely refused to leave out. She declared that she would not dance if the flower woman at the corner of Willborough Avenue didn't get a free pass into the pit. That flower woman and Judy had been fast friends for years.

She had a beautiful seat all ready for Chummy, of whom she had heard nothing since the receipt of a post card from Cornwall in reply to Judy's long and rambling account of her extraordinary good fortune.

Whenever Judy saw Bastien, she asked him if Chummy had not come back; and he said no. It was very strange. Judy could not understand it at all; and on Alan Steyne's part there was the same silence.

It came to the last day before the first

night. Judy's heart was very sore. Chummy not to be there when she first danced in public! Every few minutes of the day she found herself thinking about it.

Alan she dared not think about; but Chummy—it seemed to her that Chummy was the most important person in her life. All those years when she and Chummy had fought life together—all those poor, hard-working years! Years of slavery, yet they had been happy in a way. And had Chummy forgotten it all? Didn't she care a bit?

Judy felt so lonely, so small. London was so big. She was sure she was going to fail.

Chummy had received her letter, Judy knew. She must read some newspaper or other; and she had not sent a word to her friend!

Then, going home about six o'clock, Judy found Chummy waiting in her little sitting room. As usual, it was a bower of flowers. She knew now that Gideon sent them; but she had said nothing. She loved them too much.

It was a gray day, and it had been drizzling, but Chummy's hair and her delicately tanned face seemed to make sunshine in the room. Judy flung herself on her.

"Oh, Chummy darling, what joy and bliss! I've been so miserable! I've been thinking you'd forgotten little Judy! I was hating the idea of to-morrow."

"I came back for it, Judy," the other girl said, when Judy finally released her and she could breathe. "How splendid you look! I had a cold, and was laid up. Oh, dear Judy, I am so glad—so glad!"

"Chummy, you've been ill, and you never let me know!"

"No, not ill—just seedy. There were some bad gales, and I was caught on a very wet day; but I'm all right now."

"I've got you a lovely seat," said Judy. "I don't care what happens, now that you're going to be there!"

In breathless haste she poured out the whole tale of her wonderful luck. So innately modest was little Judy that you might easily have thought that her genius had nothing to do with it at all.

When she had finished, a silence fell. Something had to be said. They both knew it. They looked at each other. Judy's glance was fever bright; Chummy's was serious, but serene.

Judy nerved herself.

"And—Mr. Steyne?" she asked.

"I don't know whether he's still in Paris," Chummy said quietly.

"Tell me, Chummy—it was only a tiff, wasn't it?"

"What do you mean?" Chummy replied, with her new, grave smile.

"I mean between you and Mr. Steyne. Chummy, from the first I knew it must be only a quarrel."

"You are wrong, Judy. It was never a quarrel. I couldn't quarrel with Alan—you know that. We were always such—friends."

"Friends!" cried Judy, with some bitterness. "Chummy, are you keeping something from me?"

"No, Judy dear. Why should I?"

"Do you really truly mean that you didn't want to marry Mr. Steyne?"

"Really—of course."

"Chummy, you seem years older! I'm sure there's something."

"There's nothing, Judy dear."

"And you don't know where Mr. Steyne is now?"

"No." Chummy was not looking at her friend. She spoke very slowly, as if choosing her words. "I have not heard from Alan, Judy. You see it was better not, since we had parted. He saw it just as I did. He was very generous. He might have reproached me."

"Reproached you?"

"Yes, for leaving it until so late. I ought to have spoken sooner."

"You ought not to have spoken at all!"

"Judy dearest, you must admit that I know best."

"I'm utterly miserable about it. It's spoiling everything for me."

Chummy did turn her eyes on her friend then. An eager question flashed into them for an instant, like a bright flame. Her whole being seemed to glow with an intense and violent light. It was as if something were impending, something tremendous, so that she dared not breathe; but slowly she turned her eyes away again.

"I thought perhaps you might have heard from Alan, Judy," she said.

"I?"

Judy's voice was what it had never been in her life before—frightened.

"Yes, Judy dear," Chummy went on gently. "It seems strange that he has written to nobody. And you and he were friends, too."

"Yes," said Judy.

She looked at her friend. A blank silence fell. Judy knew in that moment—she knew that Chummy knew the truth. Chummy knew that Alan and she loved each other; and that was why she had refused to marry him.

"Yes," said Judy again, in a very little voice. "Yes, he and I were friends, too."

They talked of other things after that, and presently Chummy went away. She was tired after her long journey, and she had her little home to set in order. Her little home, thought Judy—her little, lonely home!

She went away, this new Chummy, so much older but so much more beautiful.

The great night was indeed a great night. It was a stupendous, a blinding, success. It was silent with the silence of acute enjoyment; it was noisy with the noise of uncontrollable enthusiasm. The house yelled and roared, and held its breath, and yelled and roared again.

Little Judy Grant was a great dancer—there was no doubt about that.

She was the whole program. There was a ballet, of course, and a very good one. She herself had only three people appearing with her, and they were mere adjuncts, though useful and appropriate ones. Her dances were danced alone.

Judy had three changes of scene. First came a Greek scene, in which she did three different dances—a woodland dance, a girl playing ball, and a moonlight idyl to the music of Panpipes. The next was an elaboration of the Italian night that she had danced at Alan Steyne's, and here she had on the stage a boy who played the guitar. The third was a series of old English dances, which brought down the house. Judy, as *Jack-in-the-Green*, was simply irresistible, laughing out of her little green house of foliage. As an encore, she gave a child's dance in front of a Punch and Judy show.

The final curtain fell on an indescribable scene of enthusiasm.

Up at the back of the gallery, Alan Steyne had stood from the first moment the curtain went up. He had returned from Paris unknown to everybody.

To him it was a night of wild torture and of wild delight. The artist in him reveled in it. The man loathed it. For the most part, while the program was going on, the artist carried the man away.

When the calls could no longer be taken, and the manager had announced Judy's complete exhaustion, Alan ran down the steps like a madman. He hung around the stage door. A big car was drawn up there. Alan knew whose it was. He was blind and mad with misery; but he could not go away.

Presently a little person came out. He crouched in the shade, and breathed with relief. A crowd of men swept around it—the boys from the Café Turc. Gideon's bulky figure fought through them to Judy's side.

Then Alan heard her voice, gay and hoarse and half delirious. He caught a glimpse of the familiar many-colored shawl in which she was wrapped.

"No—no, Mr. Gideon—no, Tony and Michael—no, all of you! I'm tired out. Call me a cab. I'm going home alone. I'm going home alone to cry myself to sleep!"

XXXII

JUDY cried for two days, on and off, because Guarvenius had not been there to see her triumph—or his triumph, as she called it. Had he not taught her everything she knew, and had he not been like a father to her?

She was astonished at herself. She had not thought it would be so easy, so inevitable. She had not known what she was doing as she danced. It had just come. All the careful rehearsing had gone out of her head. She had just danced.

Of course, she found herself in a maze of business engagements, which at first confused her very much. For instance, Matthew Tannary, who controlled vast theatrical interests all over Europe, offered her a three years' contract at what seemed to her an enormous salary. She refused, of course, considering herself tied to Mr. Wyon; but when she told him about it, he urged her to accept the offer.

"The season at my theater will much more than repay me for any outlay I have made, Miss Grant," he said. "I don't want you to consider yourself tied at all. When everything is settled up, there will be several hundred pounds for you by Christmas. We are booked right up to then. After that, as you know, the theater is let to Vallance for his Shakespearean season. I am not a theatrical manager, you know. My theater is more or less a hobby. I am

only too glad to have been the means of making you known to the public; but you are at liberty to accept the best contract offered to you."

Even to Judy's ignorance of business methods this seemed a marvelously generous action. She tried to thank him.

"But, my dear young lady, I am only too glad to have been of service to you," Wyon repeated. "My advice to you is to accept Matthew Tannary's contract, beginning after Christmas. I wish you every possible success."

He beamed on her with his rather womanish smile. He seemed actually to want her to accept this contract. She was more than touched by his kindness.

Each night her success was repeated. In fact, the enthusiasm of the audience grew greater and greater. The house was packed to overflowing.

To Judy, it was still very unreal. The roar of applause always seemed to come from a very long way off. She hardly realized that the audience was shouting at her; but her friends' praise made her very happy. Bastien devoured her performance with his ardent eyes every single night. Tony Leigh and Michael Stone and all the other boys thought her wonderful.

Everybody told her so. They drank her health when she went to the café one noon-day. They made speeches in her honor. Michael Stone recited a poem he had written. They were almost crazy with delight in her triumph. It was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened in the lives of any of them.

Judy saw Chummy every day. She saw to it that she did. Otherwise the two girls would probably not have met. It was not that Chummy avoided her friend, but she was working very hard in her studio, while Judy's hours were very exacting, and she was obliged to regulate her life by strict rules.

Strangely enough, little Judy Grant was an artist in the classic sense. All that Guarvenius had taught her of incessant practice and study and rigid self-discipline and early hours she had grasped and made her own, so that it was now second nature. Of her emotions Judy was ever a spendthrift, but of the energy necessary for her work, at this time of her life, she was a veritable miser.

She showed no inclination to enlarge or improve her style of living. She stayed

in her two rooms in Clive Street. She did not launch forth into clothes and hats; she never took a cab unless it was to go to the theater. She ate and drank as sparingly as ever. But for her work, she seemed to be in a state of suspended animation.

Thus passed a whole month, and Judy had refused all Gideon's invitations, as well as those of various people quite unknown to her who had suddenly desired her acquaintance. It rather amused her. They were very smart people, some of them. Ladies deluged her with requests to dance for charity. Men of high rank begged her company at supper; but all to no purpose. Judy had placed herself entirely in Mr. Wyon's hands, and his advice was to keep herself entirely to herself.

On one occasion Mr. Wyon rather astonished her by asking her a personal question. They were in his rooms at the theater, and she had just shown him a copy of her contract with Matthew Tannary. He pronounced it to be most satisfactory.

Then he turned to her with the smile that always made her think of an old lady.

"Miss Grant, is Mr. Bruce Gideon, the well-known financier, a friend of yours? Somebody told me he was."

"Do you know him?" she asked sharply.

"I have met him—yes."

"I shouldn't really call him a friend of mine," Judy said, weighing her words; "but he has been very kind to me. He introduced me to dear M. Guarvenius, you know."

"Oh, did he?"

"I'm sure I've told you that before, Mr. Wyon."

"Oh, yes, Miss Grant, I believe you did mention it. I understand Mr. Gideon is a very remarkable man."

Judy looked at Mr. Wyon with her sudden smile.

"As a matter of fact," she said impulsively, "Mr. Gideon wanted to do just what you've done for me, Mr. Wyon."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but M. Guarvenius offered to bring me out himself."

"When he died, didn't Mr. Gideon renew his offer?"

"He might have done. I don't know. I didn't give him the chance."

"Why was that, Miss Grant?"

"Well, you see, it was somehow different with him. It wouldn't have been entirely business, like it is with you, Mr.

Wyon. I can't explain, but you can do things with some people and not with others. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think I do, Miss Grant. At any rate, as I have often said, I am only too pleased to have been of service to you. Have you seen Mr. Gideon lately?" he added casually.

"No, not for ages—not really since the first night, when he came behind for a few minutes. I've so much to do, and you advised me not to bother about society."

"Quite so, quite so, Miss Grant," he replied. "But of course one must discriminate. Some people may be very useful to your career."

Judy laughed.

"Well, the next time Mr. Gideon asks me to dinner I'll accept," she said. "You must come too, Mr. Wyon, and meet him again. By the way, I think I might give a little dinner party myself one of these days."

When she had gone, and he knew that she was safely in her dressing room, Mr. Wyon rang up Bruce Gideon in Mount Street.

"I have done what you asked me to," he said, when Gideon's soft voice answered. "I brought up your name in conversation with the young lady just now."

"Yes?" asked Gideon eagerly. "Well?"

"She has not the slightest suspicion, I assure you," Mr. Wyon went on. "If she is avoiding you, it is not because of that. She thoroughly believes in my business dealings with her. She told me about your offer to her, and gave me to understand that she looked on it differently—more personally, I suppose. And here's a little hint—she said that the next time you asked her to dine she would accept, and I must come too." Mr. Wyon laughed discreetly. "But I will be conveniently engaged, or indisposed."

He hung up the receiver, with his characteristic smile on his face.

Judy, full of her idea of giving a dinner party to all her friends, sought out Chummy the next day. Clarissa was hard at work on a big canvas for an important exhibition. She still looked well, but very tired, and Judy was alarmed by the way she turned to her and said:

"Judy, have you seen Alan? Do you know if it's true that he's been ill?"

Judy's heart gave a wild leap, and then seemed to stop still. She did not know

what her face expressed. She did not give it a thought. She was so smitten by the idea that Alan was ill, perhaps alone, with nobody to look after him.

She did not feel her friend's quiet gaze riveted on her face. She did not know that her secret was written on it plainly for all men to see. Perhaps the fact that she had already seen for herself that Chummy knew made her less on her guard.

"Who told you?" she asked, finding her voice.

"Bastien, last night. He had seen Mr. Hylton—you remember him, Judy, at the studio that night? Mr. Hylton told Bastien that Alan had been ill. I thought perhaps you would have heard."

"No—why should I?" asked Judy, in a more truculent tone than she had ever used to Chummy before. "Why didn't you go and find out?"

"Mr. Hylton told Bastien that Alan was already better, and had gone away."

"Where to?"

"He didn't seem to know."

"I didn't know Mr. Steyne was in Eng-

(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

land," Judy said with elaborate carelessness.

"He came back for your first night."

"How do you know?"

"Michael saw him at the stage door."

"I'm sure he didn't!" cried Judy indignantly. "If he was there, I never saw him. Chummy, I think you're rather extraordinary! Once before you seemed to think I might have heard from Mr. Steyne. Why should I, any more than you?"

"I thought you had been good friends."

"But you said you're still friends with him, Chummy."

"I know—only it's a little awkward, you see."

"I don't see!" Judy spoke almost angrily in her misery. "And I think you're awfully silly not to make it up with him," she added, her loyalty coming to her aid and making her voice quite steady and even careless. "You must be out of your mind, Chummy dear, to think that your old painting comes before Mr. Steyne, whom you've loved all these years. In time you'll see I'm right!"

APRIL IN THE WOODLAND

As in the woodland I walk, many a strange thing I learn—
How from the dross and the drift the beautiful lost things return,
And the fires quenched in October in April return;
How foulness grows fair with the stern lustration of sleets and snows,
And rottenness changes back to the honeyed breath of the rose,
And how gentle the wind that seems wild to each blossom that blows;
How the lost is ever the found, and the darkness the door of the light,
And how soft the caress of the hand that to shape must not fear to smite,
And how the dim pearl of the morn is drawn from the gulf of the night;
How when the great tree falls, with its empire of rustling leaves,
The earth with a thousand hands its sunlit ruin receives,
And out of the wreck of its glory each secret artist weaves
Splendors anew, arabesques and tints on his swaying loom,
Soft as the eyes of April and black as the brows of doom,
And the fires give back in blue-eyed flowers the woodland they consume;
How, when the stream runs dry, the thunder calls on the hills,
And the clouds spout silver showers in the laps of the little rills,
And each spring brims with the morning star, and each fountain fills;
And how, when the songs seem ended, and all the music mute,
There is always somewhere a secret tune, some string of a hidden lute,
Lonely and undismayed, that has faith in the flower and the fruit.
So I learn in the woods that all things come again;
That sorrow turns to joy, and that laughter is born of pain;
That the burning gold of June is the gray of December's rain.

John Alden Adams

Judas

HOW GUY MALLERY CLOSED A LONG ACCOUNT WITH A
HATED ENEMY

By William Merriam Rouse

IT lacked about two hours of Mallery's great moment. Usually a man's time comes upon him like a thief, but Mallery had prepared the climax of his own life with an intelligence and a persistency which few men could have equaled. After the climax another life would begin; but all that might follow the great hour was of lesser importance, as had been all that went before.

He had chosen to take Madeleine Carter to dinner this night. Now they sat before the fire in her living room, talking, falling silent, watching the lazy flames, as they had through so many perfect evenings in the past. This evening was to be cut short by the business that called him, and he sought, therefore, to taste each moment of happiness.

Her bare arm lay along the dark tapestry of her chair, round and white and exquisitely finished by the sensitive fingers of a musician. Light from a shaded lamp touched and illuminated her dark brown hair. Now and again the fire, suddenly ambitious, outlined a profile as beautiful as her own music.

Mallery knew the dark blue eyes that were at present hidden, and the smiles that lay forever half revealed within them. In her presence he felt also a certain revelation of power—a latent power. She had the great strength of gentleness.

Mallery was slumped down in his chair, with the paradoxical habit of relaxation which some nervous men have. His powerfully muscled arms strained at the seams of his dinner jacket, and his jutting chin was wedged into the opening of his collar.

He loved her; and he knew that she knew it, although he had not said so in the three years since their acquaintance had begun. The time would be after to-night;

but, because he loved her, he felt it necessary to say something of what he was going to do. He threw his cigar into the fire and straightened up.

"Madeleine," he said, "to-night I shall close my account with Johnson Blair."

Her arm moved slightly; the fingers closed. She turned her gaze from the fire and looked at him.

"Just what do you mean by that, Guy?"

Her voice was touched by more than a trace of anxiety. It warned him, that anxiety.

"I mean that I shall collect my debt. You've never heard from me, and I doubt whether you have from any of our acquaintances, just what he owes me."

"I should like to have you tell me," she said quietly.

"A wife, three hundred thousand dollars, and fourteen years," replied Mallery, as one reads off the items of an account. "That is the tangible debt. In addition there is suffering, which is measureless."

"I did not know it was as bad as that," she murmured.

"I want to tell you before I go." He paused to glance at his watch. "I shall begin the collection a little before eleven, and it's after nine already. I'm going to tell you now because to-morrow, when I come to see you again, I want to forget about it. You know who Blair is?"

"Yes."

"He's a predatory animal—that's the word. Fifteen years ago I rather admired him for it. We were friends, or I thought we were, from our first meeting. He was a burly conqueror, and that sort of thing. Mrs. Mallery admired him, too, very much. Not a week that he didn't dine with us. That was after he'd divorced his wife. I didn't know then that he'd driven her out

because he was tired of her—divorced her here in New York on manufactured evidence, so that he wouldn't have to help her, and practically blotted her out. I believed his story then."

Madeleine Carter leaned forward and poked the fire. When he did not go on, she spoke slowly.

"He married Mrs. Mallery after the divorce, didn't he?"

"Yes. She died a few years ago; but that's not it. That part of the debt I wouldn't collect if I could."

"You—you don't care?"

"Madeleine, you must know that I don't. It's the more intangible part of the debt that I'm interested in."

"The suffering?"

"That's it. He ruined me to get her. When he told me that a certain railroad merger was going through, I trusted him. He told me to buy, but he sold secretly. I plunged. It smashed me. He had timed it so that it came just when he had Mrs. Mallery at the romantic stage. Blair was clever. She started for Reno the day after my brokers sold me out."

"And you?" Her voice was very low.

"I made a fool of myself!" He laughed, but without mirth. "One morning, about a year later, I awoke in a fifteen-cent flop joint, and realized that I was a fool. I had tried to find forgetfulness, and had found—hell! It was that same day that I got my inspiration."

"From—whom?"

"From 'The Count of Monte Cristo.'" He gave her a quick, mechanical smile. "I had begun to think of revenge, and I remembered that classic of vengeance. It came to me clearly that nothing but vengeance could bring me peace. Madeleine, from that day to this I've shaped every thought, every action, to that one end. To-night I shall smash him!"

"So that's the thing—the veil—that has been in front of you!"

"If you want to call it that. It's been a long fight—fourteen years this fall, the same length of time that *Edmond Dantès* was shut up in the *Château d'If*. Fourteen years to climb back from the gutter to a business of my own—to build up a financial mantrap and push Blair into it. He can't go back, he can't go forward, and if he doesn't do either he will be ruined—smashed—at forty-five! He hasn't the moral fiber to stand it, Madeleine!"

"And afterward?"

"For him? I don't know. I hope he'll live—and suffer!"

"I meant for you, Guy."

"Oh!" Mallery rose with the ease of a man who keeps himself hard and trim, and stood with his back to the fire, looking down at her. "For me—peace. Happiness, I hope."

"If peace," she said, still with her gaze upon the burning wood, "why not happiness, Guy?"

"They aren't the same!" He spoke briskly, but his certainty of thought was beginning to waver. "The happiness will depend upon—you."

Now she did look up at him, gravely and steadily. Her face told nothing. Mallery squared his shoulders.

"I didn't intend to say that to-night," he said slowly. "Of course you've known how I've felt. You must have known it almost from the first. I wanted to finish this other thing, and wipe the debt out. I couldn't ask you to share that with me."

"No."

"To-morrow it will be finished!"

He ended with a rising inflection, inviting her to answer his implied question.

"Just what are you going to do to-night, Guy?"

"I've worked him into a big transaction, by making the bait big. He's been interested in mining properties lately—I mean in the actual operation of them. Well, I baited the hook with copper—options on big holdings that would make him a copper king if he could work them for a few years. He's bought machinery, hired high-priced men, given and taken contracts. If he doesn't go through with it, his forfeits and general liquidation will leave him bankrupt. The options expire to-night at midnight. He has an appointment to take them up at eleven o'clock from old John Latham, at Latham's house. I arranged it. Blair won't keep that appointment. I shall see to it that he doesn't—after I've let him know whose hand shaped his course!"

"How will you prevent him?"

"That I can't tell, even to you." Mallery spoke regretfully. "Not until to-morrow. I shall come to see you then."

"Yes, you may come," she told him; "but the answer will be the same as it would be now."

A curious feeling of unreality swept over him, as a tidal wave sweeps over a city.

He had hoped, believed, that Madeleine cared for him. At the least he had expected that she would give him a chance to win her love, if he did not already possess some measure of it. He found that he was leaning heavily against the mantel.

"Madeleine!"

The word was a whisper. He met her eyes and searched them desperately for some hint of a reason. Suddenly an idea came to him, as flashingly as that idea of vengeance had come to him fourteen years before. He fought against it with all the strength of a will fire-tempered and steel-like; and yet the idea remained with him, implacable.

"I can't give any other answer," she was saying gently.

"It's 'no,' then?"

"Yes."

"It's because"—he hesitated, and wrenched the words out—"because of what I'm going to do?"

"Yes."

That was the idea that had come to him just now. It had a right, then, to confront him. It was as if he beheld a figure of destiny offering in one hand vengeance and in the other Madeleine Carter.

It was ironic, this offer—as ironic as life had always been to him; for how could he have peace without vengeance? If he had no peace, how could he find happiness with Madeleine? Or how know peace if he lost her? He was going to be tricked again!

If he were to give up the end toward which he had made fourteen years of his life a means, that relinquishment must be made immediately. The chains with which he had bound himself to his purpose were strong, set as with ring-bolts of determination. It was equally true that the strength of his love for Madeleine Carter had grown stronger than chains. It was the strength of steel against iron.

The curved lines which fourteen years had etched at the corners of Mallery's mouth grew deeper. Beneath the brush of hair that had become finely shot with white little drops gathered and glistened in the firelight. He removed his shoulders from the mantel's support, and stood firmly upon his legs.

"If I give it up, will you be my wife?"

In the question was the announcement that to win her he would give up the reward of his best years. Vengeance had been more precious than life to him, but he

offered to barter it—offered in a voice that cracked upon the words like the voice of an old man. He saw that the eyes of Madeleine were wet; that, unheralded, silent tears ran down her face.

"No," she said, in that same voice of infinite gentleness and of unyielding strength.

The word had the stimulus of a blow. He stiffened. It was as great a shock, and perhaps as unexpected, as her first refusal; but in the small interval of time he had gathered strength, even out of his struggle with himself. He could bear this as he had borne the lesser agony of fifteen years before. Let the inevitable come!

He looked again at his watch. It was ten thirty.

"I shall see you again?" he asked, almost in his natural tone.

"Yes."

Madeleine rose. She smiled at him, pitifully unconscious of the tears that gleamed upon her cheeks. She held out her hand, and for an instant it lay within the grasp of his muscular fingers. Like a benediction, her palm was pressed against his. He bowed, with a little touch of formality, and went out of the room.

II

MALLERY had allowed himself half an hour. It proved just enough time in practice, as he had proven it many times in his careful calculations since the exact manner of the undoing of Blair had been determined upon. A few minutes to get a taxicab, a certain length of time to drive uptown, and an arrival at Blair's house, just off Fifth Avenue, approximately ten minutes before he was due to meet Latham, who lived in the same block.

Mallery knew Blair's habits as well as he knew the house, where he had been a guest many times in the former days. His enemy lived alone with a few servants, who, with the exception of the butler, would be out of consideration at this hour. Blair would be in his library, where he worked whenever he did any work at home, getting his papers ready for the closing interview with Latham.

To the butler Mallery had given considerable thought, for he did not wish to be announced, and he had decided upon his procedure. He met the wooden face of the servant with a smile that he forced into a grin as he stepped into the hallway.

"Johnson Blair's in?" he whispered, and caught a flicker of assent in the man's eyes. "Haven't seen him for fifteen years, and I'm going to surprise him. Be in the library, if he's home at this time in the evening? Thought so. I'll sneak up on him!"

Mallery had also counted upon the strong appeal in the yellow back of a twenty-dollar bill. He had one ready in his change pocket; folded with the numerals in sight. He wore a soft black hat, but he had unbuttoned his overcoat, so that the pleated bosom of his shirt would assure the butler of his social status.

There was a brief hesitation, and then came the faint hint of a grin in answer to his own. The twenty-dollar bill vanished.

"Very well, sir!"

Going up the stairs of that house was like climbing into a lost existence. Mallery went briskly, for the benefit of the butler; but when his hand laid hold upon the knob of the library door, his manner changed. Emotions and movements and features all took on the nature of the purpose that had brought him to that house.

He opened the door softly. He moved into the room and closed the door behind him with extreme deliberation, photographing upon his mind, as he did so, every detail and every change in a room which he had visited so often in the far past.

Blair was sitting before the big teak-wood writing table, which remained where it had been always, in the front of the room, between two windows. A new divan stood in front of the fireplace, but the same clock ticked from the mantel. The whole effect was as Mallery had remembered it.

Blair must have heard the click of the closing door, for he swung around quickly, with his brows lifting. At first he remained motionless, with an expression of mildly annoyed inquiry remaining upon his pink-fleshed face. Then his eyes narrowed, gleaming. His lips forced a smile.

"Well! Why the dramatic entrance, Mallery?"

Blair had that rich huskiness which sometimes manifests itself in the voice of a man who has lived exceedingly well for a good many years. He had grown a little pale within the past few seconds, but in spite of that fact he seemed abundantly healthy—yes, robust. A bigger-framed man than Mallery, he outweighed him by fully

twenty pounds. That this was so gave Mallery a kind of satisfaction. There would be so much more triumph in bringing down the colossus—in seeing that pink flesh turn flabby with the poison of financial ruin!

"I've come to collect," said Mallery.

"Collect what? I don't owe you anything. You've got no business here!"

Blair was frowning now. He jerked himself up out of his chair and walked forward toward the fireplace, so that he could see the clock. As he did so, Mallery moved down the room casually until he was nearer to the writing table than was Blair. The telephone was on that table, as well as an ivory-tipped button which, Mallery knew, could summon the butler.

"You owe me a wife, a fortune, and fifteen years, Johnson. I'm going to collect now!"

Blair heard and understood, although his mind was as much upon the time as upon the words of his visitor. It was getting close to eleven. He snapped out his watch and confirmed the clock.

"Have you gone back to hootch?" he sneered. "You talk like a fool!"

"I suppose I do," agreed Mallery, in the same level tone that he had used from the beginning. "When a man thinks about one thing for fifteen years, he's apt to get a little—foolish."

"Crazy, you mean!" snapped Blair. His scowl deepened, and he fiddled with his watch. "I thought you'd called it quits long ago. Hell, man! It was all in the game. Plenty of men have been cleaned out in the Street. As for Clarice—well, that wasn't the only divorce that was ever granted by the courts. I divorced my first wife. It didn't kill her."

"If what people said was true, you might as well have killed her!"

Johnson Blair's face grew deep red. He thrust his watch back into his pocket with a trembling hand. Then he jerked his arms forward, with the pawing motion peculiar to the heavy-bodied man when, being a little too snugly tailored, he becomes mightily angry.

"I don't want to argue with a crazy man," he said. "I've got an appointment at eleven o'clock."

The invitation to go was plain. Mallery smiled at him grimly.

"You'll never keep that appointment," he said.

Blair opened his mouth and closed it again. Slowly the rich color faded from his face, leaving it pasty. In his eyes there gleamed a light of anger mixed with alarm.

"I'll have you thrown out!" he barked.

"You won't go to the door, or to your desk, or away from where you are now, for an hour," Mallery told him. "I don't want to use a pistol, but if it's necessary I sha'n't hesitate."

"Damnation!" Blair's glance darted to the clock and went swiftly back to Mallery. "That's ru—"

He bit off the word. His fingers opened and shut spasmodically.

"It is ruin," agreed Mallery. "That's what you started to say. That's what I intend it shall be. I framed up this copper proposition, Blair. I worked up your interest by indirect propaganda, and arranged to have the options offered to you at the psychological moment. I paved a copper path to millions for you; and it's all quite straight—only old Latham is acting for me, and he has instructions to turn the properties over to a syndicate if you don't act on your options before midnight. *You won't do it!*"

"What—why—"

Blair stopped, helplessly.

"What did I do it just that way for? I'll tell you. I wanted to see you crowd into sixty minutes all the hell I've suffered in fifteen years—that's why. There's only one way to strike you, and that's by breaking you. You never loved even a dog, you aren't a coward, and you'd make more money if I left you anything at all; but you can't stand it to be broke, Blair, and damned well you know it!"

Mallery knew his man. For the first time Johnson Blair's eyes widened with fear. He ran a tongue over dry lips. Mallery understood that it was not physical fear—the threat of poverty was the weapon that had found his victim's vulnerable spot.

Gradually Blair's face darkened. He measured the distance to the desk with his eye, and began to study Mallery. He meditated attack. It was his only hope, and, except for the pistol, a good hope.

Mallery did have a small automatic in his pocket, but he had no intention of using it unless a third person should enter the situation. Blair could not know that, however, and he had to assume that he would risk a bullet. In any event, he would be better off than he was now. Bet-

ter death than ruin! If he were wounded, the sound of the shot would bring the butler, and there might be a chance to close the transaction with Latham by telephone.

Mallery followed the reasoning that went on within the turmoil of Blair's mind. He saw the bulk of his enemy grow tense, and fully five seconds before the attack he knew that it was surely coming. His single dread was of a cry for help, but he had not counted in vain upon Blair's courage. A cry for help usually comes only as an afterthought to a brave man.

Johnson Blair came forward with a bull-like rush, his arms swinging. Mallery was amazed at the clumsiness of the man, forgetting that while he had been preparing for such an emergency as this Blair had been growing soft with fat living. He stepped in to meet the attack, feinted, parried his assailant's swing, and drove his right fist into the stomach before him.

The force and weight of the two moving bodies were in that blow. Blair went up to his toes, tipped backward, and bent in the middle as he collapsed upon the divan. He lay there, half doubled up, with the breath whistling through his open mouth.

III

It was not a knock-out, but for effect it might as well have been. Helpless as a stricken beef, Blair looked up out of glazed eyes. The clock upon the mantelpiece had ticked away half a dozen more of his precious minutes before he gave evidence of returning strength.

Mallery stepped a little nearer to the divan. Blair had nothing but a call for help left to him now. Mallery did not want to lay hands upon him again, but he was resolved, nevertheless, to shut down upon that padded windpipe at the first deep intake of breath.

He watched. Slowly the pain faded from Blair's eyes. He began to breathe naturally again.

It was from the eyes of Blair that Mallery learned of another presence in the room. They shifted from their fixity upon his face, and, except that they widened with some emotion not in the nature of relief, Mallery would have thought that the silent-footed butler had come in. His hand reacted to the warning. It went to the pistol in his pocket, even as he stepped backward and turned his head in the direction of the door.

Madeleine Carter was there, standing against the closed door, and regarding the two men with outward calmness.

As always in the life of Guy Mallery, the thing least to be expected had happened. The evidence of his eyes was difficult of belief. It was not reasonable. Earlier she could have stopped him by a word, but she had not chosen to do it.

He knew that she was not a woman subject to caprice, and that she had not changed within the hour. Nor had he. His jaw muscles tightened. Johnson Blair must pay!

Blair lifted himself, with a groan, and sat up, although he found it necessary to brace himself with his hands. He was watching Madeleine Carter to the exclusion of any other interest.

She walked across the room slowly, and stopped not far from the two men. Mallery took the pistol from his pocket. Her glance flashed to it and then to his face, but without surprise. She was more beautiful than Mallery had ever seen her. He knew the feeling of a lost soul gazing upon paradise; but he did not become the less determined.

"Get that madman out of here!" wheezed Blair.

His voice rasped through the silence, tightening Mallery's fingers upon his weapon. Madeleine gave no heed either to the speaker or to his command. All her attention was concentrated upon Mallery.

She let fall the veil of her spirit. It looked at him out of her eyes, naked and unashamed. Love he saw there—such love as poets touch reverently in their thoughts—a love that was for him, and that was at the same time inclusive of all gentleness, all pity, all forgetfulness of self. For that instant he was lifted above the Guy Mallery who stood, pistol in hand, seeking to collect a debt.

"Judas!" she said to him.

The name, the last of all words ever spoken by man that he would have expect-

ed for himself from her lips, pierced him as steel goes to the heart. Her face blurred to his vision, and he heard his own voice in an agony of protest.

"Judas?" he cried. "Judas is there!"

He pointed to Johnson Blair. As he did so, he glimpsed in the face of his enemy a dawning triumph; but that did not matter now. The name that Madeleine Carter had called him was more terrible, coming from her, than the loss of his revenge.

"No—it's you who do wrong!" she said. "I wanted you not to want to do it!"

"He is the traitor!"

"Oh, Guy!" Her voice rang with pleading and her hands lifted, supplicating him. "You're betraying yourself—and God—when you take this revenge! You're betraying me—and love!"

He wavered. Must he, after all, go away empty? Her plea was noble, it was worthy to come from her lips, but for him it was not real.

"You don't know what you're asking!" he groaned.

"But I do know!" Her clenched hands raised and struck out wildly in the direction of Johnson Blair. "Oh, God! That man has done things to me that can't be said in words! *I was his wife!*"

Through the silence that fell upon them came the steady tick of the passing of Blair's hour. Some understanding of what Madeleine Carter must have suffered as the wife of Blair reached the brain of Mallery. As from behind a clearing mist her beauty grew to his eyes. It became radiant with the joy of perfect peace.

The pistol dropped to the floor. Mallery held out his empty hand to her, as simply as a child would offer proof that it had ceased from being bad.

"Madeleine," he said, "I don't want to smash him!"

"Then come, dear heart!"

She took his hand in both her own and drew him with her toward the door.

THE OLD ARMCHAIR

WHENE'ER I sit in this old chair,
Memory, the wizard, brings me near
To one who passed in childlike trust
And sleeps beneath the senseless dust.
Thus love, in retrospective way,
Brings back each vanished yesterday.

William Hamilton Hayne

The Perfumed Man

LET THE OCCIDENTAL BEWARE THE MAGIC SPELL OF A
LOVELY ORIENTAL LAND!

By Winifred Lee Wendell

"HOW stupid of me, Mrs. Reeves, I'm so sorry! I've broken one of your treasures."

The American girl raised a distressed face to her hostess, then looked down at the shattered remains of Mrs. Reeves's most precious cup and saucer. An amber trickle of spilled tea, staining the old Turkish rug, added to the catastrophe. Indeed, it just escaped immersing the lemon-tinted sandals of the third member of the party in the little roof garden.

"Don't give it a thought, child," was the reassuring reply. "It was made here in Algiers, I believe, and I sha'n't have the least trouble in replacing it. Shall I, Prince Musa?"

Mrs. Reeves turned brave eyes upon the sandaled gentleman, who took the cue and smiled his complete understanding of her little white lie. None knew better than he that there was no such thing as replacing this particular bit of porcelain.

"None whatever, *madame*. It will give me pleasure to replace the cup and saucer which Miss Jarvis has broken."

The rather lazy, mellow tones of the prince were intended to soothe; but Ruth Jarvis, in the act of picking up the broken fragments of china, shot a look of resentment toward the Algerian highness.

"Oh, but you will do nothing of the kind!" she declared sharply. Did this obtuse Oriental think that their friendship gave him the right to pay her debts? "I shall make good Mrs. Reeves's loss," she added.

"*Mademoiselle* does not understand," the mellow, unaffronted voice went on. "My father owns the potteries where this ware was made. It would give him great pleasure to present Mrs. Reeves with a set of cups."

The American girl's resentment flared again. Was the Algerian prince stupid, or obtuse, or both?

"Your father's gift would in no way lessen my obligation. Please understand that I will see that Mrs. Reeves has another cup and saucer."

She looked at the little heap of useless porcelain gathered in her hands, and then shot another distressed glance at her hostess.

"Throw them in that basket, my dear, and don't think of them again—please!" insisted Mrs. Reeves.

As the girl obeyed, Musa's dark eyes followed her. There was an odd look in them. He didn't understand the quick resentment; and when an Arab doesn't understand, he misinterprets.

The wife of the English tea merchant saw the prince's expression, read the possible conjecture behind it, and proceeded to neutralize it. She smiled warmly into Musa's brown eyes.

"I should be delighted to accept the gift, prince." Meeting the girl's surprised glances, she continued: "Making gifts in the Orient, my dear, is as natural as sunshine. For instance, my husband has just sent a chest of his choicest tea to Prince Musa's father. He accepted the gift as naturally as—well, as you accepted Mr. Manning's rose this morning."

Ruth Jarvis gave her hostess a quick, embarrassed look. Did Mrs. Reeves's keen eyes, she wondered, see the swift kiss which Roger the audacious had imprinted upon Ruth's fingers as she took his morning offering?

From the lightning change in Musa's dark face at mention of this episode one might easily have believed that he had witnessed it. His strong, brown fingers

clenched the silken folds of his burnoose. The Englishwoman saw the look and those tense fingers, and was conscious of feeling as if a sudden draft of chilled air had shattered the golden warmth of the African sunlight which, at the moment, steeped the little marigold-edged roof garden.

"And so it seems that Mlle. Jarvis accepts gifts from other gentlemen friends!" observed Musa softly.

Again the Englishwoman felt the necessity of coming to the rescue.

"Mr. Manning is an old friend from America. You should know each other." She made her little speech hastily. "He raises cattle very successfully. I am sure he would be interested in your wonderful goat farms, prince."

"If fate wills it, we shall meet," said the Oriental oracularly.

During the moments of quiet that followed the hostess busied herself at her table, pouring a fresh cup of tea for Ruth. In that land of golden silences it seemed natural for three people to sit together without speech, and quite free from the embarrassment which such a situation would call forth in an occidental setting. Musa walked to the edge of the terrace and stood there, his splendidly robed figure silhouetted against the blue and gold skyline, staring with somber eyes over the roofs.

To Ruth Jarvis the moment was fraught with new and strange inward conflicts. A month ago she had never seen or heard of Musa. At the beginning of their odd friendship she admitted his fascinations—to herself, though never aloud. She was complimented, her pride was quickened, her innocent vanity of youth was thrilled by his conspicuous attentions.

Musa was a personage in Algiers. He was immensely rich, politically a power, and of princely blood. The fact that his mother was a Frenchwoman of good birth gave him entrée to the English and French colonies. His boyhood education in England made the knowledge of English an added asset in his intercourse with foreigners. Both English and French women vied in their efforts to attract him.

The American girl had given him a direct glance from her wide-set blue eyes, and had allowed him to talk with her a brief half-hour, and no more, on the night of their introduction at the English Club, with no thought of conquering him; but

from that moment he had neither eyes nor ears for any one else. She had yielded to the spell of his unusual personality, his subtle and magnetic appeal, his almost feminine intuition of her moods, with innocent abandon.

The unexpected appearance of Roger Manning at the St. George tea room the previous day brought the girl to a sudden realization of a situation which made her gasp with dismay. She saw in the American's keen glance, in the unmistakable tone of his greetings, that he had come for her reply to a question which, the day before starting for Europe, she had refused to answer; and she was more than ever unready to commit herself now.

Then it had not been a question of rivalry between Roger and any other man. It was, rather, an unwillingness to exchange her freedom for something which to her untrammelled young soul spelled bondage. Roger wanted love, and love meant the submergence of her personality to another. Against the onslaught of his persistent and demanding courtship she found herself instinctively flinging out defenses on every side.

If Roger had not been so peremptory in his courtship! If he had been willing to give more of himself and demand less from her! If he had been willing to treat her as—well, as Prince Musa treated her! She knew in that moment the cause of her mental arraignment of Manning—*Musa, the Algerian*.

Never, during the delicious weeks of their strange companionship, had the Oriental made single demand upon her. He had simply infused himself, his splendid person, his liquid voice, his dark, warm eyes, into her life. He had colored her thoughts, directed her desires, until she found herself looking at life through his eyes rather than through her own. Up to that crystallizing moment she had called it the spell of Africa; but the instant she sighted Roger Manning she knew that the spell of a very different nature was upon her.

Manning, in his plain, well-tailored tweeds, with his straight blond hair, his well kept but large-boned hands, his nice big mouth with its frank and winning smile, had been—up to a month ago—the most likable and familiar figure in Ruth's life. To-day, from the moment when he loomed up beyond the ornate, carved screens, the

frescoed walls of the tea room, he was a stranger—a stranger!

II

THE tinkling of a telephone call took Mrs. Reeves from the terrace. Alone with the girl, Musa faced her slowly. He was smiling, but there was something cruel in his smile. It was the expression of a man who is about to say something that will hurt the hearer, and who finds pleasure in saying it.

"Mme. Reeves has admirable self-control," he said in his careful English. "She smiled when *mademoiselle* broke her most highly prized cup."

"Please do not make me feel any worse than I do," replied the girl unhappily. "She said she wouldn't have any trouble in replacing it."

"Nevertheless Mme. Reeves does not expect to replace it. She believes there is no other like it."

"Why do you torture me so? It is rude of you—horribly rude!"

She stared at him with hurt, uncomprehending eyes, then rose and turned from him to look through unbidden tears at the surrounding loveliness of a scene which no longer had power to charm.

"Because"—Musa's voice was low, and she felt the potent spell of his warm glances before her own met them—"because I want to help you. What *madame* thinks is not so. There is just one other cup and saucer like this one. It is in my father's potteries, with his treasures, and it is mine for the asking. It is yours, *mademoiselle*, if you will make me the happiest of men by accepting it. Ah, you do not believe me! You shall see for yourself. You shall go to the place where it is. I myself will take you. We shall spend a most happy day together."

When had she ever heard the word "together" uttered so magically?

"To-morrow morning we shall motor there," the prince went on. "It is a short trip—an hour, no more. We shall lunch *al fresco*. Early in the afternoon we shall return with the cup and saucer for our friend." He bent toward her. "You will go, little *sassan*?"

The last word was a caress. A hundred voices in her heart cried "yes," while one, louder than all the others, warned her to say "no."

"Where are your father's potteries?"

She asked the question to give herself time—time to quell entirely that warning note.

He launched into an enthusiastic description of the route. After an appreciable silence, she said firmly, but with a sharp breathlessness in her voice:

"No, prince, I cannot. It is too much to accept."

"But—"

She met his pleading monosyllable with an even firmer shake of the head—for Mrs. Reeves's return to the terrace put an end to words between them.

A look between the two women implied a question and an answer.

"Was that Roger?" asked the girl's eyes.

"Roger," the other eyes replied.

They did not add that Roger had telephoned from a neighboring booth; that he was at that moment crossing Mrs. Reeves's threshold.

When the American stepped upon the terrace, his shadow fell directly between Musa and the girl. He was mopping his brow with an immense linen handkerchief. Vigor, bigness, directness, masculinity, suddenly invaded the secluded little terrace. The others were poignantly conscious of a new element—a somewhat disturbing one.

Although he walked directly to his hostess, Roger's eyes were upon the girl, conveying a greeting which made the clasping of hands quite unnecessary.

"Hope I'm not too late," he said.

"Just in time," replied his hostess. She turned to the prince. "This is Mr. Manning, of whom we were speaking." To Roger she said: "Prince Musa is one of our Algerian friends whom you should know, Mr. Manning."

She busied herself at her tea table, conscious that her peaceful little roof garden had suddenly become a battle ground. From the corner of her observant eyes she saw the American stiffen and bow. He made no offer to shake hands. She wondered if Musa had noticed the omission. If he had, the inscrutable eyes, the mobile lips, gave no evidence. He, too, recognized the introduction with an almost imperceptible motion of his turbaned head.

"And what brings M. Manning to Algiers, *mademoiselle*?"

The girl looked at him in surprise. Why in the name of common courtesy did he not address the question to the young man

for whom it was intended? Prince Musa was holding her, Ruth Jarvis, accountable for this unwelcome and intruding presence. Moreover, he was coolly demanding an accounting!

But it was Mrs. Reeves's voice which answered him.

"The same thing that brings all of us, Prince Musa—the thing that brought my husband and me ten years ago, and won't let us escape—the spell of your lovely Africa!" She turned to the girl. "Ruth, dear, will you please pass Mr. Manning the cake? He looks as if he wanted to devour something!"

She handed Roger his teacup as Ruth offered the cake. Ministered to by both women, he was for the moment the lion of the occasion; but only for the moment. A delicate odor of sandalwood permeated the air as the prince walked up to the little wicker tea table. The American, scenting it, sniffed contemptuously.

"From a perfumed man deliver us!" said Roger's nose.

"Mme. Reeves, I bid you good afternoon." He bowed, unsmilingly, to his hostess, and turned to the girl. "Until to-morrow, *mademoiselle!*"

He held out his hand for hers, and as she gave it to him he bent and lightly brushed the white fingers with his lips. Then he looked squarely into Manning's suddenly paling face, bowed, and left the terrace.

Drifts of orange light from the western skies striped Musa's white garments as he passed, and again the scent of sandalwood was noticeable. Manning was the first to break the perfumed silence.

"Impudent nigger!"

"Roger! He's no more a nigger than you or I."

"My dear Ruth, you know better," was the hot reply. "Ask Mrs. Reeves."

His excited eyes turned to his hostess, pleading and challenging at once.

"He was rude, but he really isn't a—a nigger, Mr. Manning," was that lady's diplomatic reply.

"Roger was rude, too," said the girl. "He didn't offer to shake hands, and Prince Musa knows perfectly well that in our country men always shake hands when they're introduced."

Under the fire of hot words Mrs. Reeves rose from her tea table and incontinently fled.

"I'll leave you two to finish poor Musa. I'm *de trop*."

The door closed upon the hostess's retreating form. Alone with the girl, Roger turned upon her swiftly.

"If he ever touches you again, I'll kill him!" He was white to the ears. His large, strong hands were trembling like a child's. Not jealousy merely, but a sense of something having been violated, shook him body and soul. "Why do you stand up for him against me?"

"I didn't, Roger; but I want you to play fair, and you aren't doing it."

"Would you mind telling me what he meant by 'until to-morrow'?" he asked humbly, for the gentleness in Ruth's last words disarmed him.

For an instant she hesitated, knowing that her answer was certain to whip up another storm in this tempestuous young man. Then she decided to tell Roger the truth.

"He wants me to drive with him to his father's potteries. It's only an hour's drive."

"And you said 'no,' of course?"

Another time, under normal conditions, she would have met this, too, with the simple truth. To-day she compromised.

"I didn't say anything."

"Does Mrs. Reeves know?"

"No, and I don't want her to!" cried the girl. "Oh, you don't understand, Roger. Something very unfortunate happened this afternoon, just before you came. I broke a cup which Mrs. Reeves treasures above anything she owns. She thinks it's the only specimen in existence, but it's not. Prince Musa owns another, and he wants me to have it and make good my stupid carelessness. It's to be a surprise for Mrs. Reeves. We were going out to the potteries to get it—together."

Unconsciously her voice took on the tone of Musa's as she uttered the last word.

Roger did a totally unexpected thing. He strode close to the girl and took both her wrists in his strong fingers.

"But you aren't going to do anything of the kind, Ruth. *I forbid it!*"

"Let go my wrists, Roger! You haven't any right to say that!"

The color had left her cheeks. She was conscious of a fierce anger against him.

"I've the right that any decent white man has to protect his womenkind. You're alone in this heathenish mess of a country,

and it's my duty to look after you," he said doggedly.

"I'm not alone," retorted the girl. "I'm visiting Mrs. Reeves and her husband. My father intrusted me to their care."

"Then I shall ask Mrs. Reeves to send this fellow about his business. He's not proper company for a nice girl!"

Ruth faced him with angry eyes. All the hardness of youth and intolerance were in them and in her voice.

"If you do, I shall never see or speak to you again!"

"You don't mean that, Ruth?"

There was no anger in Roger's voice now, but only a great hurt.

"I do mean it, every word," she responded steadily. "Mrs. Reeves introduced Prince Musa to me. He is her friend. It would be an insult to her."

For an instant their glances locked. The conflict of his will and hers was pushing them apart. Then Roger turned toward the house. She felt that he was going to leave her without speaking to her again. It would be like him. He had done just that on other occasions.

At the door leading from the roof to the house he paused.

"Very well, Ruth!" His voice was low and desperately unhappy. "I shall handle this Musa fellow in my own way, without any woman's interference!"

Despite the gentle tone, his words were a threat.

Ruth was alone, staring over the marigold-edged roof garden with hot, outraged eyes. She decided that she would accept Musa's invitation for the morrow. She would go with him to his father's potteries. She would return to tell Roger that the prince had falsified his unworthy suspicions. She would satisfy her own conscience and make Mrs. Reeves happy by presenting that lady with the mate to the broken cup.

III

"BUT really, Mr. Manning, you needn't be the least bit worried. She's gone off with friends for the day a great many times. It's nothing unusual, and she has always come back safely."

Mrs. Reeves's tone was gently reproving. The American's appearance at her door the next morning at an unconventionally early hour found her unprepared for formal visitors; and Manning at that moment looked

not only formal but formidable. He made no reply to her little speech, and she felt the necessity of filling up the uncomfortable silence with words.

"You've no idea how popular Ruth is with the English colony," she went on. "They've quite adopted her. I shouldn't be surprised if she were with the Raby girls this minute."

"I know far better than you how popular Ruth Jarvis is. I was brought up with her," was Roger's unspoken thought. "Didn't she leave word where she would be?" he said aloud.

"In a way," explained Mrs. Reeves. "She left word with Nora that she was going to Mustapha for the day, and that she would surely be back in time for tea—which is five o'clock." The sudden dismay in his unhappy face smote her. "You're invited, my dear Mr. Manning," she added, "and no one else!"

"Thanks—I'll come if I can. I won't trouble you any longer, Mrs. Reeves."

It was stiff and awkward, but she, womanlike, understood and sent him away with a reassuring word and smile.

"I'm sure she's in perfectly good hands," she told him.

Reaching the nearest telephone station, Manning called the Club Militaire and asked for Captain Worthing.

"Roger Manning speaking, captain. You were kind enough yesterday to offer me a flivver for sight-seeing. I'd like one this morning, if possible. Thanks, very much! I'll be down at once. By the way, do you happen to know where a Prince Musa lives? Yes, that's the one. Friend of Mrs. Reeves. You mean a native guide? That's very kind of you. If you can spare one. I'll be down as quickly as possible. Good-by!"

He hoped that Worthing hadn't noticed the odd trembling of his voice. As he came out of the booth, he knew that his heart was beating damnably. He felt with horrible certainty that Ruth had gone with Musa. He was going to find them and bring her back himself, if he had to do it over the Algerian's dead body!

IV

"BUT we've driven two hours already and we aren't there yet!" Ruth Jarvis shot a glance from her wrist watch to the smiling face beside her. "You said an hour, you know."

She was reproving not so much Musa as herself, for the time had flown on wings, and she had been all to unmindful of the fact.

From the villa-dotted gardens of Mustapha to the road that wound over the hills of the Sahel, one charming vista after another had captured her delighted glances. On every side loveliness was sending messages, and Musa, effacing himself, had allowed the messages to come through uninterrupted. Never had he seemed more agreeable, more tactfully considerate of her pleasure. The powerful French car with its native chauffeur was a part of the charm.

At the beginning of the drive they were passing strange traffic—donkeys laden with merchandise, and their owners, barefooted men, running beside them; water-carriers, whose tinkling bell tones echoed faintly the honking of motor cars; stages taking pleasure seekers from the hotels of Mustapha to the hub of the modern city—the Place du Gouvernement. The big car whirled by them all.

"A flivver, if you please, and driven by natives," cried Miss Jarvis, pointing to an industrious little machine chugging by.

Musa smiled with tolerant indifference at the sight; but the girl watched the flivver with a sharp twinge of—homesickness? It must have been that. What else could a flivver suggest but America? The white-robed natives looked incongruous enough in this most unoriental of conveyances. They stared straight ahead, concerned only with the business of steering their vehicle through the traffic.

When Musa's car turned abruptly and thrust its big, enameled nose into a byway, the flivver slowed down, turned, and at a discreet distance followed the other car.

Odors of wild things growing, of wooded places, songs of birds, replaced the confusion of the highway. Algiers lay behind them, a pearl shining in the turquoise cup of the sea. The purple-shadowed mountains loomed ahead.

"*Mademoiselle* will forgive me for taking the longer way? Had we gone the shorter route she would have missed—that!"

His silk-clad arm swept the horizon.

As the girl's glance followed the prince's gesture, she was forced to admit that she would not have missed it for worlds. Never had her eyes feasted upon such gorgeous-

ness of color. Crimson-petaled flowers hung from the branches of cypress or eucalyptus like coral necklaces. Hawks shot through the tree tops with a soft whirl of wings, seeming like patches of shining jet against the translucent blue. Irises, gray-green and lavender, edged a path that struck off into the hidden places of the woods.

"If *mademoiselle* wishes, we shall lunch here," said the prince, as the car slowed down and stopped. "At the end of that path is a clearing. I myself have lunched there many times."

"I'm starved!" she admitted.

And well she might be hungry. Rising before her hostess was awake that morning, she had taken a hasty breakfast, leaving her misleading message with Nora, the maid, to deliver to Mrs. Reeves. She had not wanted to deceive the charming friend who was making her visit in Algiers so delightful. She simply wanted to disarm Roger Manning. Well, she told herself with a little tremor of excitement, so far she had succeeded!

Just as Ruth Jarvis was congratulating herself upon having evaded her American friend, the little flivver was parking about a hundred yards down the wooded byway. Its occupants had alighted and were stretched upon the ground, placidly smoking American cigarettes, and talking together in low tones. They spoke English.

"*Monsieur* need have no anxiety. It will be a simple matter. I myself know every member of Prince Musa's household." The speaker smiled. "One word from me, my friend, and they would find themselves in an unpleasant place!" He flicked the ash from his cigarette with a delicate motion. "The position of foreman carries with it a certain magic, one might say, *monsieur*. I am not unknown to friend Musa as a magician!" he finished, with a significance that was not lost upon the other.

"I wish that I might work some of your magic upon him," said the other grimly.

"That is not altogether impossible. *Monsieur* wears our native costume with much grace. He has perhaps played the rôle before?"

Roger Manning vigorously shook his head. His face felt stiff and sore beneath the walnut satin. His turban, the flapping skirts of his *k'sa*—the toga worn by old

men—were annoying him to the point of desperation. As he wrestled with them, he wondered if he were sending himself upon a fool's errand. Then, suddenly, he ceased to wonder. The remembrance of Musa's perfumed body, his warm glance, and the touch of his too red lips upon Ruth Jarvis's hand was like a sword thrust through his own body. It brought the young American to his feet.

"I've never played the rôle before, but I'm going to play it through to a finish this time!" he said doggedly.

Musa's chauffeur was evidently skilled in the art of table service, as well as in that of driving a motor car. With quiet and unerring dispatch he served a perfect luncheon. His master had forgotten nothing. Even the pale French sauterne, served in delicate gold-stemmed glasses, was not lacking.

When Musa gave a toast, staring at the girl over the rim of his glass, his dark eyes bright with laughter, the charm was complete. He was an ideal cavalier. She entirely forgot her desire to see him in a coat of mail. As a carpet knight he left nothing to be desired.

Having served the luncheon, the servant went back to the car to eat, and to enjoy his smoke in his own way—which was to take it through a long-stemmed pipe and in profound silence.

For the first time in their acquaintance, Ruth Jarvis was entirely alone with Musa. There was something very intimate and exciting in it. On every side the woods inclosed them. Overhead was a sky of burnished gold and blue. Beneath was spread a carpet of vines and shrubs full of a delicious fragrance. Beside her sat Musa, looking, in the colorful splendor of his garments, like a picture from the "Arabian Nights." He had chosen that particular costume with meticulous care—the flat, red-topped tarboosh on his head, the scarlet vest, the yellow leather riding boots, the green silk rope slung beneath his left shoulder, from which hung a little curved dagger in its fretted silver sheath.

As she sat with her new friend in the little African wood, Ruth's thoughts reverted to other jaunts taken with Roger Manning in the Litchfield Hills of her own Connecticut. She believed at that time that nature could never show her anything half so lovely as those wooded slopes and

winding roads; those stone walls laced with woodbine; those fleeting glimpses of white-pillared doorways and gray flagged walks; of rose-bowered pergolas rising against the blue New England hills. The African scene was equally lovely, but in a fashion so entirely different that comparison was impossible. It would be like trying to match winter against summer or light against sound. There was no question of rivalry between the two. She was simply weaving an added strand of color and beauty into the tapestry of experience, of life.

Musa had not told his companion the true reason of his choosing the longer route. Halfway between the potteries and the city was his own dwelling place. It was one of the show places of Algeria, and he was inordinately proud of its barbaric splendor—the tiled floors strewn with priceless rugs, the glint of brasses and brilliant silk hangings, the hand-carved furniture, the endless clutter of bizarre bric-a-brac.

He wanted Ruth Jarvis to see his treasures. He wanted to see her blue eyes widen with delight as he led her through his great overlaid rooms. He wanted to overwhelm her with a sense of the vastness of his riches. It was the Arab in his nature, beneath the French veneer, disgorging his wealth for her to envy. That she would envy it he hadn't a doubt. Did not Americans value material possessions above all else?

Musa had never desired anything in his life and not secured it. Self-denial, renouncement, sacrifice, were unknown words in his vocabulary. He desired this American girl, Ruth Jarvis, with a violence of the senses as well as of the mind, more madly than he had ever desired anything else.

When her eyes glimpsed the great, white-walled villa rising from a lovely garden, and her lips voiced her delight with an involuntary cry, what was more natural than for Musa to signal to his chauffeur to stop?

"But surely this isn't a factory?" the girl exclaimed.

"This, *mademoiselle*, is where I live. The potteries are just beyond. Would *mademoiselle* care to walk through my garden?"

"Care" was a weak word. Ruth longed to drench herself in that wilderness of perfume and color, and the watchful brown eyes of the man read the longing before her lips had time to voice it.

"We have a saying here in Algiers, 'The ascent to the house of a friend is easy.'"

He jumped from the car and held out his hand as he spoke.

Who could resist such courtesy?

V

FROM the flat roof of a wing of Musa's house a pair of veiled eyes, peering down into the garden, saw a sight which sent slipped feet padding madly across the roof. Five minutes later an astonishing piece of news had spread from roof to court—the master was bringing a *roomee*, or Christian woman, to his house.

Torn between wild jealousy and a wilder curiosity, Musa's native wives stared over the parapet at the fair-haired, short-skirted girl whose unveiled face was raised so fearlessly to meet the warm glances of a man's eyes. The boldness of it! The wonderful freedom of that look!

When she stepped beyond the entrance to the villa, Musa following her, the excitement upon the roof became vocal as well as mental. Under but one condition would Musa ever bring a white woman—a respectable woman—into his house in broad daylight, and unchaperoned. Had he not warned them more than once of the impending calamity? Had he not told them bluntly that a day would come when he would bring home a *roomee* bride?

When that unescapable catastrophe overtook them, they knew that they would mean no more to him than his cast-off sandals. He would do with them as his father had done with his native wives when a Frenchwoman—Musa's mother—had bewitched the wealthy Algerian. The prince would exile them to one of his farms in the mountains of Kabylia, to be herded with his goats!

To-day the thing had happened.

As Musa led Miss Jarvis through his house, pointing out his treasures, telling her with childlike frankness the prices he had paid for them, a native woman slipped down from the women's wing and followed them with noiseless feet. A lifetime of secretiveness had made Musa's newest wife expert in the art of spying without being spied upon, of listening without being discovered.

When her husband led his guest to one of the high-backed divans—a French importation—in his largest reception room, the native woman, anticipating that move,

had already crouched behind the divan, awaiting their coming. She held her breath in the fear that her wild heartbeats would betray her.

This new wife loved Musa in her own fashion. She had been married to him less than two years. She had given him a man child. She remembered his words as she laid that brown, wriggling bundle of humanity—her flesh and his—in the prince's arms.

"These others are but the blossoms in my garden. Thou art the perfect flower!"

How quickly he had forgotten! Torn with jealousy, she lay enmeshed in the silk hangings that trailed over the back of the couch where her husband sat with another woman. Her tattooed forehead was buried against her brown little arm. Although she could not understand what Musa was saying, she knew from the tone of his voice that he was in love with this white woman. She had heard that tone before—addressed to herself.

As she listened, she thought of what she had just done, back there in her husband's dining room, where Larbi, the house boy, was preparing sliced citrons, sweet cakes, and native wine for Musa and his guest. She had poisoned the wine in one of the glasses. It had been a simple thing to drop the colorless powder into the glass when Larbi's back was turned.

The inlaid tray, the cake basket of gold filigree, the special glass from which Musa always drank—gold-rimmed and with a twisted stem—and the smaller, unornamented glass reserved for his guest, were all familiar to her. The last time they were used was when she and Musa were married. They were the glasses with which the prince and his new wife had pledged their vows—used for this occasion and never for any other. Whatever doubts she may have had as to her husband's reason for bringing the American girl to his house were quickly dispelled when she saw Larbi busily preparing this special feast.

When the boy's brown, sandaled feet slipped noiselessly across the tiled floor, the tray held aloft in his hands, Musa's wife watched him through half-closed eyes. For one swift, terrifying moment she regretted her mad act. She put her fingers to her throat as if it were difficult to breathe. She wished that she had put the death-dealing powder into the other glass. The reason why she had put it into her husband's glass

was a logical one. Although she would lose him, it would put him beyond the reach of any other woman's embraces as well. If, on the other hand, she had poisoned the girl, Musa would simply get another white woman before the year ended.

Larbi put the tray with its seemingly innocent little collation on the octagonal teakwood table, salaamed to his master, and padded softly from the room. It would be but a matter of seconds before Musa would raise the death potion to his lips. His wife's desire to cry out, to stay his hand—though such a betrayal of her presence would mean certain death—was almost overpowering.

Perhaps Musa would have allowed her, of all his wives, to remain in that part of his house into which his white wife would never be allowed to go—a secret joy, a refreshment to his savage nature, when the first rapture of possession of the new wife had worn off. And she had done the thing which would destroy the possibility of such a happiness.

VI

MUSA turned slowly and looked at the American girl. For the first time since he had believed himself in love with her he allowed the full fire of the passion that was consuming him to show itself in his eyes as they sought Ruth Jarvis's cool glance.

With a woman's curiosity, she was admiring the dainty tray. When, in the silence following, she raised her eyes to his, her innocent glance changed to a stare in which fright and surprise struggled together. The look in the man's eyes scorched her like a hot flame, sweeping her face. She drew back, fright succeeded by horror and repugnance.

Versed in the emotional reactions of women, the Algerian saw that he had made his first mistake. He knew that he must quell her fear, reinstate himself in her confidence, induce her to stay long enough at least to drink the wine which he had so carefully prepared. Once the potent liquid had dulled the edge of her fright, had sent the blood pulsing back to her cheeks, her heart, she would listen to him, would suffer him to touch her, without repelling him.

He bent toward her, his slender brown hands linked behind him. The fact of his not touching her while she saw and felt the utter longing of the man was not lost upon her. More than once her American

lover had leaned just so—eager, hungry for her sweet womanhood, yet waiting for the look, the word from her which would give him the right to claim it.

But the effect of Musa's unvoiced plea was exactly the opposite of that which Roger Manning inspired. She felt a horrible sense of repulsion. The Algerian's spell was broken. She hated as well as feared the man whose presence, up to that moment, had made mere daily living a pageant. She knew with clear, deep-hearted prescience that he could and would destroy her happiness as utterly as she had destroyed her friend's cup.

A broken cup in his hand—she would be just that!

She sprang to her feet, her eyes seeking the windows, the doors, of that Arab prison. She wanted to feel the sunlight in her face, to see open country, breathe free air.

He followed the glance of those haunted eyes and read the desire in them. His hand went out to hers; but she drew away shudderingly, and by her act and look he knew that he had made his second mistake.

"I must go, *monsieur*. It is late, and—we have to get the cup for Mrs. Reeves, you know. You see"—she hesitated, then went on stumblingly in her quickly invented little tale—"I told her I was going with you. She said that she and Mr. Manning, and perhaps the Rabys, would drive out and meet us at the potteries. I expect they're waiting for us now."

"Of course—as *mademoiselle* wishes," he said smoothly; "but first let us drink a little glass of wine and have a sweet cake. It will take but a moment."

She nodded, trying desperately to tell by his eyes, his voice, if her little story had carried home; but Musa's face and tone were a mask. He reached for the small, unornamented wineglass.

Dark eyes, burning with fire, watched him in the long mirror hanging opposite the divan. In it Musa's wife could see every detail of the scene reflected. She knew that he would offer the girl that smaller glass before taking his.

Then the thing happened which made the stifled cry of agony tearing the native woman's heart and body change to a cry of joy.

With an impulsive motion the girl reached out for the gold-rimmed glass into

which Musa's wife had put the powder, and raised it to her lips.

VII

THE foreman, his hand on Roger Manning's shoulder, stood in the smaller courtyard of Musa's house, surrounded by a group of bowing, hand-rubbing, obsequious Arabs.

"My brother from Tunis is without hearing or speech," he was telling them. "Allah has afflicted him. Give us something to eat and drink, for we have come a long way."

His words, addressed to the steward of Musa's household, were curt and business-like. He was a familiar figure to them all, and his command was law. Was he not the official spy through whose all-seeing eyes and all-hearing ears the magistrate kept in touch with everything that happened in the quarter over which the foreman had jurisdiction? He held them, so to speak, between his thumb and forefinger, as one might hold a flea; and he would as unfeelingly crush them as it.

Food and wine were served in the steward's office. Manning choked them down, drinking the native brew thirstily. He chafed under these preliminaries. He was maddened by the enforced silence which bound his tongue and forbade his crying out his mad desire, brushing them all aside and seeking the woman he loved.

The foreman, reading the inward turmoil in the American's mind, nodded to him, smiling his complete understanding.

"Patience, my friend! Leave it to me. There is a way to do this thing," the smile and nod conveyed.

When the steward led them from the whitewashed walls of his little office to the marble-pillared portico, he paused.

"Wait here, sahib. I will tell the prince you desire to see him."

"I prefer to see him unannounced," said the foreman curtly.

A peculiar expression crossed the steward's face. He dared not disobey his master's strict injunction not to admit any one within the villa while he was entertaining the white woman; yet he feared to oppose the foreman. He was between the devil and the deep sea.

"I have orders, sahib," the steward began again.

"My orders precede any others!" snapped the foreman.

Waving the steward aside, he strode across the portico toward the French doors leading to the reception room. Manning followed, conscious that if looks could kill, the glances of the steward would slay him then and there. Although the American had not understood one word of the gibberish that passed between these two, he knew that conflict and fear and hatred were coloring it.

Upon the threshold of the inner room the two men paused. The sudden transition from glaring sunlight to shadowed, rug-hung walls found them staring into what was almost impenetrable darkness.

Then objects in the room began to prick the darkness with points of light; and the first thing to catch Roger Manning's straining glance was the white flutter of a woman's gown. The second object to detach itself from the darkness was a woman's arm uplifted, and the glint of something sparkling and crystal in her hand.

"Don't drink that, Ruth!" he cried sharply.

Miss Jarvis, in the act of putting the gold-rimmed glass to her lips, paused and stared over it into Roger Manning's eyes. Even if he had not spoken, she would have known those honest eyes, despite the brown face, the white robes, the turbaned head.

She lowered her hand and mechanically put down the glass, untasted, upon the tray. She heard a low, angry sound from Musa's lips. He, too, had set his glass down untouched, and was staring at the intruders with inflamed eyes. As his glance met the foreman's, an ugly, baffled look crept into it. It was the expression of pride and fear in conflict.

"God bless you, prince!" greeted the foreman, using the familiar salutation of his people, and sweetening it with an ironical smile.

Musa knew the meaning of that smile, and feared it; but his anger at the unannounced presence of the foreman and his rival was stronger than his fear. He pointed to the door and uttered a single word:

"*Hoh!*"

"He is inviting us to get out," interpreted the foreman to Manning.

The American's reply was to stride over until he stood within a foot of Musa. With quiet deliberation he spoke to the girl.

"I have come to take you home, Ruth."

She looked at him, and in that look a mute but unutterable thankfulness sent its

message to the man's hungry heart. Then she turned to Musa. He was fumbling at the green silk rope beneath his left arm. She remembered what was in the fretted silver sheath that hung from that silken cord. She knew that Musa was trying to get at the little dagger which, not an hour before, he had allowed her to handle, enjoying her pleasure in its exquisitely carved hilt. Without taking her eyes from those seeking fingers, she spoke in high, trembling tones.

"Prince Musa is going to show you his little dagger, Roger. You must show him your revolver—*first!*"

Musa's fingers faltered in their quest. He saw a movement beneath Roger's loose garment, and in the same moment the Algerian was looking with astonished eyes into the barrel of a little shining thing in the American's hand.

A soft laugh broke the tense silence. The foreman, stroking his beard with a plump brown hand, allowed himself this expression of mirth over what seemed to him the best joke of the season. He would rather enjoy seeing the American kill the Algerian; but on the other hand it would rob him, the foreman, of a chance to settle up old scores in his own way. He turned to Manning.

"Go out the way we came, and take *mademoiselle* with you. I have a message for the prince from the magistrate."

From the corner of his eye he saw Musa flinch. There was that in his tone which made the prince wish that he had killed the foreman first and the American next; in-

stead of which both were to escape him—and the girl as well.

Musa watched with still, baleful eyes the exit of the American and Ruth Jarvis. The foreman, alone with his host, looked at Musa with the same ironical smile on his bearded lips.

"There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet! Is there any reason why a perfectly good glass of wine should go untasted because a foolish woman had the poor judgment to prefer a white-livered Christian to a real man?"

He reached for the small wineglass, and, raising it to his lips, drained it.

Musa's dark eyes avoided the look in the eyes of his tormentor. Instead, they stared at the glass which a moment before had been caressed by the dainty fingers of the woman he had loved and lost. He snatched it from the tray, put it to his lips, and drank. Then, with a violent gesture, he dashed the empty glass to the tiled floor. A thousand crystal splinters glittered like jeweled eyes against the black mosaics at his feet, mocking him. Then, very suddenly, he sat down and closed his eyes.

The foreman looked at the inert figure and shook his head reprovingly.

"That glass was worth something, my friend. Why add one loss to another? I shall call your steward and have him clean up. Then I shall tell you what the magistrate has decided to do with you!"

He did not notice, until he came to the end of his sentence, that he was speaking to a dead man.

I WILL TAKE THE LONE PATH

I WILL take the lone path
That leads up from the sea—
The dark path on the hillside,
That winds eternally.

I will take the still way—
The quiet way and long,
Where there's neither laughter,
Happy love, nor song.

But though I take the dark lane
Within the cypress gloom,
I know there waits me somewhere
April's scented bloom!

Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff

Storm Surge

HOW A WOMAN FOUND THAT WHICH SHE HAD LOST

By Jane Guthrie

THE back door was flung violently open. A man coming through slammed it after him and stopped a moment to listen to a collie barking furiously within, begging to go with him. Then, muttering a savage oath, he plunged into a smother of wind-driven snow and sleet and plowed his way to the stables.

A woman—his wife—stood with a white, set face in the middle of the room the man had just left, gazing furiously, resentfully, at the door he had banged to. He had punished the dog for a trivial offense, she had interfered, and he had struck her with a whip and then plunged out into the storm.

It had not happened in the passion of one swift, lightning stroke of sudden anger, but as the end of slowly piled-up clouds and sullen hours. It was like the storm outside, which had been long gathering, and had then swept down in a fierce onslaught, holding these human creatures helpless in its vortex.

Turning on her heel, the woman walked over and sat down beside the stove. She sat erect, almost rigidly tense, oblivious, apparently, to the howling gale that beat at the frames of the door and windows and sifted powdery snow through every tiny crevice. If she noticed at all that a blanket which she had hung before the door to keep out the wind was displaced, she seemed indifferent to it. Her thoughts centered on herself.

The dog gazed furtively at her as he settled himself on the floor in front of the stove. For three days, during the storm which had been raging, the man, the woman, and the dog had made this room, a kitchen, their living room and sleeping room in order to keep warm.

As she sat there beside the stove, the woman's resentful eyes noted the disorder

of the room, and an overturned chair lying against a table. She jumped to her feet, caught her breath with a quick sob, and, seizing a loaded revolver which lay on a shelf beside her, gasped shudderingly:

"I'm going to kill him! I'm going to kill him!"

She was primitive woman in an elemental world, and its passions shook and gripped her. The outer world, with its chaos of swiftly moving events, the storm raging about her, even the wind-swept room in which she stood—these were the unreal, tenuous vapor of dreams. The only real thing in life to her now was the man—her husband—who had struck her with a dog-whip.

She eyed the thing scornfully as she saw it lying there under the couch, where he had tossed it when he flung out of the room. Then, shaken with a tempest of sobs, she laid the revolver back on the shelf and dropped again into the chair, her tears burning dry in her flaming eyes.

The stove needed wood. Bending down, she took some sticks and threw them on the fire. She set the teakettle over for the water to heat, and, pushing back the sliding front of the stove, she let the flare of the flames into the room. They shone directly on the door.

It was not yet four o'clock, but dusk was dropping down swiftly, and the storm was bringing on the night; yet she made no effort to light the lamp and put it in the window, as had been her custom. She sat there still, tense, those blazing eyes fixed on the door, the one frail barrier between the man and herself.

She was young, not yet thirty, and remarkably handsome, with that high lift of the head which betokens a will that brooks no restraint and scorns interference. Something of a rich vitality seemed to flow from

her as she sat there, her soul in revolt, and to dominate even that storm-swept room. The glow of a vigorous, active temperament dwelt in her somber eyes.

When the water bubbled to the boil, she dropped her shawl and let her blouse fall from her shoulders, disclosing an arm across which zigzagged a long, livid welt. She took a cloth from a nail at her side, wet it, and held its steaming warmth against her arm. It hurt—oh, how it hurt! But the torture of the flesh was nothing to the mental outrage she had suffered.

With a shuddering gasp, she rose and replenished the fire. Then she sat down beside it to fix her relentless, savagely expectant eyes upon the door, the sting of the flesh forgotten in the exaltation of the revenge she planned.

The dog rose and laid his head inquiringly in her lap, but she pushed him away. He padded up and down the room restlessly, snuffing uneasily at the door. He wanted to find his master, although his master had beaten him for a mere trivial offense, as an outlet to his own smoldering resentment against the woman.

She ordered the animal to lie down, but instead he came whimpering. Again she pushed him away, refusing to face that inquiring, reproachful gaze. Somehow he seemed to be blaming her for something. He went to the door and barked demandingly, but she refused to move. The dog, no less obstinate, refused to leave the door, where he had taken his stand.

She noticed that the storm seemed to be dying down, the fury of the wind abating.

II

A LONG time afterward—hours, she was sure, so crowded were the moments with emotion—the woman heard her name whispered. It was an eerie sound, faint and far-away.

It came again. Surely some one called her! The sound came down the wind and swept away on its dying gusts.

Again, after an interval, came that weird ghost of a voice, faint and far-away, like the half forgotten memory of something she had heard in happier days. She shivered at the fancy. The dog, standing with ears erect and tail outstretched, barked and moaned deafeningly.

The woman got up and put some more wood upon the fire. The cold was increasing, and she dreaded that stealthy, inex-

orable force like an impalpable presence, creeping, creeping toward one, waiting to crush life at its very source.

Suddenly she raised her clenched hands and held them above her head, as if vowing to beat her way out of the prison of the soul and body in which she found herself immured.

Then the returning rage of the wind shook the room as if it would tear it to pieces, and sifted long, white fingers of the storm across the floor toward her to threaten her with their grasping clutch. She stared at them with a sort of horror in her eyes. What was she to pit herself against fate? Why try to conquer destiny? Why not give the storm its way?

And then she laughed, and her laugh was not pleasant to hear. She to sit back conquered? She to yield to the storm because a man, her husband, had struck her with a whip? Never!

There was revenge. It lay warm at her heart; and, as she nursed it, it held her in its dominating grip.

The dog would be restrained no longer. Let him go to his master, if he would! She walked over, opened the door for him, and watched him plunge into that dim, pale land of ghosts outside. Then she shut the door and went back and sat down by the stove, grimly watchful, no longer afraid of the storm, or the cold, or even herself!

She must have dozed. She was not conscious of having done so, but suddenly something roused her from that tense, self-centered state in which she had wrapped herself. Instantly she was all attention.

Some one was at the door. She jumped to her feet, grasped the revolver, and stood to face the intruder.

Oh, he should have his chance, whoever it might be! He should take his choice of coming into that room, facing her, or—staying outside.

She listened, every nerve alert, but the door did not open. Surely there was some one there, fingering the latch, whispering on the threshold! Yet the door did not open. Was it just the bitter cold creeping over the forest, breathing its threatening menace through the icy blasts?

Ah, the dog whined and whimpered outside! His master was coming! Yes, but he should never enter that door again—never, never again.

She stood breathlessly waiting. The

dog leaped upon the door; but where was his master? Why didn't he come in?

The woman waited there grimly. When she could stand the suspense no longer, she walked over and opened the door.

The dog caught her dress in his teeth and tried to pull her out. She pushed him away. What had she to do with the animal's importunings? She held her shawl closely about the stinging hurt on her arm, shut the door, and started back to her chair beside the stove.

She could hear the collie's muffled bark, faint and far-away now, like that eerie call, the whisper of her name. Suddenly she laid the revolver back on the shelf, pinned her shawl closer about her, seized a cap and mittens, and went hastily out into the night.

III

THE dog came leaping toward her and bounding away again. She followed with difficulty through the deep, wind-furrowed snowdrifts. He led her to a spot some distance from the house, and, pawing there, uncovered the man almost buried under the snow.

How long had he lain there? The woman could not tell. She had lost all reckoning of time back there in that room. Her husband must have taken a wrong turning when he left the barn after feeding the animals, and must have wandered about until exhausted and overcome by the bitter cold. There had been no lamp in the window to guide him!

Hastily she turned him over, and, opening his outer coat, thrust her hand in to feel his heart. There was a feeble little pulse there yet.

That slender rill of life swept across her veins like a call to her inmost being, beating back with irresistible force the sense of self. The woman in her, the woman who has shielded and sheltered and nursed and tended from the beginning of things, heard the high command of sex—give, preserve, sustain life!

There was no help nearer than the farmer and his wife, half a mile away, and she could not lift that heavy burden; but she could drag it over the snow. Swiftly, carefully, with dire effort, guided by the bounding, leaping dog, she drew her husband home.

Once inside the kitchen, she tore the mattress from a cot in the corner, brushed

the snow from the silent, unconscious figure on the floor, and wrapped it hastily and warmly, murmuring broken words of encouragement and tenderness. Then she seized the hot plates from the stove, and, folding them in cloths, laid them about him. She mixed hot water and a stimulant, and forced his mouth open to pour it drop by drop down his throat.

She loosened his overcoat, cut away his clothes, and rubbed and slapped his body to restore circulation. She pulled off his mittens. Lest his hands should be frozen, she got snow and rubbed them with it; nor did she relax her exertions, except to give him that warm stimulant drop by drop. Much of it trickled out, but she persevered, carefully, tenderly, lest she might choke him.

Surely the heartbeats were growing stronger! Oh, surely the color was coming back into the face and hands!

She piled wood on the stove, so that the light of the flames would fill the room. She must not lose the faintest quiver of a nostril, the flutter of an eyelid.

"God give me this life!" she panted. "Give it to me! It is mine—mine!"

She had never known before how much a part of her he was.

At length the quivering eyelids opened, the bewildered eyes looked up questioningly into hers, and the man murmured in a feeble, broken voice:

"I couldn't—find you!"

The warm tears trickled down the woman's cheeks. She leaned over and encircled his head with her arms, her heart wrung by the sight of his pitifully pinched features.

She had always been proud of his physical beauty, of his well-knit figure, but a certain gentle strain in him she had never understood. She thought it an evidence of weakness, instead of moral strength, and felt contempt for it.

He moved slightly toward her, and sighed as he sank into the deep sleep of exhaustion. She rose, filled bottles of hot water, and placed them about him. Then, folding him carefully, she screened him from the wind with blankets.

She made a pot of coffee, drank some of it, ate a piece of bread, and set the coffee-pot back on the stove, to keep it warm. As she stood there by the stove, the pale dawn came stealing through the frost-rimmed windows. She looked about her

as if she had had a vision of a new world—a world entirely changed from the one in which she had been living of late.

Suddenly she became conscious of her bruised arm. It was stinging as if a hundred lashes were hidden in its red length. She put her hand to it and pressed it, to still the pain; but it had wakened to reproach her for forgetting it so long. She had not thought of it for hours, and now it beat and throbbed itself into her consciousness, like an engine of destruction—a hurt and torn part of her body.

She could not disregard it, or forget what it meant to her. It had seemed so trivial when she faced death; but life, she was beginning to realize, is sometimes a harder thing to face than death. Life, after all, is bigger than death—fuller of meaning, harder to understand. She was no longer lifted above herself by emotion. This was the cold, clear light of day. How could she face life here and now?

The overturned chair still lay there against the table, as it had stood the day before, a mute reminder. Her arm stung and throbbed and cried aloud to her. She had come down from the heights. Things that had seemed small the night before now loomed mountain high again. She caught her breath with a gasping sob. She was weary, strained.

Slowly she turned toward the man, and bent down to look at him. He was breathing long, deep, life-sustaining breaths. He would awake in a little while. Each of them, in a half ashamed way, would say something about what had happened, and then—oh, then life would go on just as it had gone on before.

But it couldn't! It could never be the same again, with what she knew and what he knew between them!

She stood again in the center of the room, deliberating. Then, as if she had made her decision, she tiptoed past the man and went into another room. There she put on long woolen stockings and rubber boots, then a pair of overalls, stuffing her skirts into them. Drawing on a sweater, she covered it with a coat and added mittens and a cap.

Still stepping softly, she stole back into the other room and bent down to look at the man once more. Then, tiptoeing past the dog, who gazed at her inquiringly, she opened the door to go out into the vast silence, upon which there now lay a pale

gleam of sunshine and the promise of another day.

The dog rose to follow her, and a gust of wind swept the snow into the room. The woman turned. The wind had displaced the screen she had put about the man, and he was lying there looking at her, his eyes no longer closed but wide open.

Instantly he caught the significance of the scene, and jumped to his feet. For a moment he staggered feebly. Then he walked over and kicked the snow from where it had fallen, shut the door, and stood there spent and pale, with his back against it, catching his breath.

"You were going away—out into that?" he questioned in a low voice.

The woman nodded.

"You can't do it!" The man's lips were tightly compressed. "Not after last night!"

"There's no use thinking of our living here together. We've tried that. I'm going back to town. I can make my way to the station for the morning train, and you—"

She did not finish her sentence, but stood with downcast eyes fingering the fastenings of her coat. In her voice was the note of obstinate determination which had always irritated him. He did not note it; instead, he looked at her for a long, tense moment, as if he would compel her to lift her eyes to his. Then he raised his hand to brush the hair from his brow. She glanced up quickly. His hands were swollen. Oh, they must be painful!

He took a step nearer to her, his self-accusing eyes burning into hers.

"God!" he cried. "I never meant to strike you. I didn't see you—you must know that; but I wasn't big enough to tell you when I found what I had accidentally done. I—I let you think that I—meant to do it!"

The woman stood still, listening, her face hard and cold.

"I've no right to look at you—even to speak to you, for that," he went on slowly, hesitatingly; "yet I'm asking you to stay on here with me."

"I couldn't think of it," she replied quickly, turning her head aside.

She seemed like a type of the eternal feminine, bound down by centuries of considering only the personal point of view—a living contrast to the man, taught by life to think on broader lines.

"If you do go"—the man's voice was sharp yet husky—"if you do go, I'll bring you back if I have to go through hell to get you!"

The woman looked up and stared questioningly at him.

"Oh, I've blamed you for all this!" he flared out, as he swept the place with a gesture. "I couldn't understand why you wanted to drag us out here to this God-forsaken country. I couldn't understand your talk about the freedom of the open spaces, and seeing things grow. I hated it! It was so still, so lonely; and when we couldn't get a farmer, and I had the beasts to feed, it was worse. It seemed a crime, to me, to waste life working and slaving here. We were losing money on the farm, and I was glad for every dollar gone. I wanted to go back to the city. You knew I felt that way, and I didn't care if you did, and—things went wrong from the beginning. But last night, out there, when I was lost, I knew—knew to the very bottom of my soul that I loved you better than having my own way. I *want* to stay here now. I'm going to like it. I'm going to make the farm pay, and I want you to stay and help me. We owe something to the venture, something to ourselves in it. We should always remember and feel ashamed if we left it as a failure!"

"There are awful things between us," she cried. "Things that you know, things that I know, bitter thoughts, angry words—oh, I can't stay! I can't go on living them over again. I won't stay. I couldn't breathe here!"

The man stared at her.

"You mean you won't stay here with me?" he said slowly, heavily. "Even after yesterday, you won't forgive me?" He drew back, his arms fell to his sides, he bowed his head. "You've won the right to go," he murmured. "You saved my life last night."

She looked up quickly at him. Now—now, at last, she knew that there were things born in that storm which were swept away on it. Something of herself was gone—her arrogance, her self-will; and she had found something more—something infinitely greater. She had found her husband for the first time, and he was bigger than she was.

"No—no!" she cried passionately.

Her voice shook and quivered. A slow flush crept over her face. Her shamed eyes looked past him to the revolver lying upon the shelf.

She took a step forward and held out her arms to the man.

"Keep me—keep me with you!" she begged.

LOVE REINCARNATE

How many times I've loved you! Oh, how oft
Some long, sweet, lonesome road has wooed our feet
In far, barbarian lands, in hours as fleet,
Where other suns as brilliant swung aloft!

How oft, to glorify our nuptial night,
White, flowerlike moons have bloomed above the wheat,
Gay, singing winds have danced along the street,
And festive stars have set the lake alight!

This love resurgent from past ardors came;
The potency of dead passion quickened this
Until it woke from dreaming chrysalis
A soaring rapture with twin wings of flame.

And our caress, so warm with old desire—
Life after life, each new betrothal kiss
Its spark passed on from some high source of bliss
To kindle on our lips this deathless fire!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Trail of Conflict*

A MODERN ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN EAST
AND WEST

By Emilie Loring

Author of "The Key to Many Doors," etc.

XXII

"AFTER all, it was absurdly like the fake attack and repulse of bandits in a musical comedy, except—except for Phil," Courtlandt thought two hours later. "And here's where the female portion of the audience would adjust hats and grope under the seats for missing articles," he added, as from the platform of the train he watched a splotch of darkness move slowly up the main street of Slippy Bend, *en route* for the jail.

The act had lacked none of the usual colorful stage setting. There had been a starry heaven overhead, the dim outlines of the rocky gap for a back drop, and clumps of cottonwoods and aspens for side wings. For the crowning touch, two green rockets had sped skyward.

The attacking party had boarded the train with just the right amount of theatrical bravado, but something went wrong. Some one must have hopelessly mixed the cues, for instead of towering over their shrinking victims the bandits had found themselves staring dumbly along the snub noses of army pistols in the trigger-quick hands of veterans. Denbigh's list had been checked off, and, save for Ranlett and Marks, every man named on it was now being personally conducted up the silent street.

Phil had made good, gloriously good, Courtlandt rejoiced to think, as he made his way to the baggage car, where Denbigh lay on the floor, his eyes closed, his face flushed with fever. Steve knelt beside him and laid a cool hand on his forehead, but the wounded man did not move.

Nelson climbed into the car.

"They've brought the stretcher, Steve. I'll attend to moving him while you get the girl off the train. I've sent for a doctor."

With his pulses hammering, Courtlandt knocked at the door of the compartment in which he had left Jerry asleep. There was no answer. Had she gone?

He knocked again, this time with a peremptoriness augmented by the fear in his heart.

"Come in!" a cool voice answered.

Steve entered the compartment. From across the small room Jerry, dressed as she had been when she flagged the train, contemplated him with unfriendly eyes. Her blouse and linen breeches showed stains of mud and weather, but they had been mended and pressed. Her boots, with the big rowels still attached, had been cleaned. Her hair, brushed till it shone like satin, had been carefully coiled in place. Even the scratch on her cheek had been reduced in color, if not in length. Her lips were disdainful, her face curiously colorless, as she challenged:

"Well?"

"We are back at Slippy Bend. We must leave the train at once. There has been—"

"I know. The maid told me of the holdup and that—that some one was hurt. I feared—I feared"—even her lips whitened—"I've been so anxious!" She caught her breath in a strangled sob. "She said that it wasn't one of the train hands or—or—a soldier, and I—I thought it might—"

"Don't worry about that—it wasn't Greyson," Courtlandt cut in brusquely, and his eyes flamed a warning. "It was Phil Denbigh."

* Copyright, 1921, by Emilie Loring—This story began in the December (1921) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

"Phil Denbigh! You don't mean the man Felice married?"

"Yes—alias Bill Small, range rider at the B C."

"And he—a man like *that*—was one of the gang?"

"No, no! Phil was in it to get information, to give warning. He is entitled to an honorable discharge from his conscience now. His testimony will rid this part of the country of about twenty undesirables."

She looked up in dumb incredulity for a moment. Then she laughed.

"So the treasure would have been saved anyway, without—without—" There was another irrepressible ripple of mirth before she asked: "Has Bruce—has Mr. Greyson been told?"

Her laughter, her reference to Greyson, snapped Courtlandt's self-control, which was already strained to the limit of endurance. Even his lips were white as he caught her by the shoulders.

"I don't know what Greyson has been told, but he'll get it straight from me that you are mine—mine!" With sudden savage ruthlessness he caught her in his arms and kissed her shining hair, her throat, her eyes. He let her go. "Now perhaps *you* understand it too!" he announced huskily.

Jerry shrank as far away from him as the narrow space would allow. The color burned in her cheeks, her eyes blazed.

"You—you have no right to—to do that!" she reminded breathlessly.

"Haven't I?"

"Don't stand there looking like a lion ready to spring. I—I won't have it! You promised—"

"That's a joke. When you ran away with Greyson, were you keeping your promise? At least you'll acquit me of making love to—another woman. I—"

The door was thrown open violently.

"Get that girl off quick, Steve!" shouted Nelson. "We leave in five minutes."

The last words died in the distance as he hurried along the corridor.

"Come!" Courtlandt commanded.

With a curious look up into his eyes, Jerry preceded him from the compartment. As she stepped from the train, she fell almost into her sister's arms.

"Peggy!" she gasped in astonishment.

Steve was no less surprised.

"Where the dickens did you drop from, Peg-o'-My-Heart? Why are you at Slippery Bend at this unholy hour?" he demanded.

"Ye gods! Don't ask *me* why! For information apply to Ito. I only know that while I was walking the floor at the Double O, wild with anxiety, that Jap tragedian appeared and announced that he must see the excellent Mr. Benson. When I succeeded in convincing him that I couldn't produce the excellent Mr. Benson, he explained that he must take me to Slippery Bend to meet Mrs. Courtlandt, by order of his honorable master."

"His master!" Jerry and Courtlandt echoed in unison.

"That was what he said. He deigned to explain that he had been told to telephone, but as all lines were out of order he had come in person to give the message to Mr. Benson. When he found that Tommy wasn't there, he insisted upon bringing me to Slippery Bend himself."

"Where is Tommy?"

"Don't snap, Steve! I don't know. I'm one little walking encyclopedia of ignorance to-night," said Peggy, with a sob which she valiantly tried to strangle at its birth. "Jerry, where have you been? That Chinese woman of yours met Tommy and me, when we got back from our ride, with some incoherent stuff about your having gone off with a gun. That sent Tommy off in a mad rush after you. All I could get out of the woman was, 'Missee tiell Ming Soy when she see little missee and Mr. Tommee she bleat glong.' If I hadn't locked her into the pantry, she'd be beating it yet!" Peggy snuggled her arm under her sister's as she asked again: "Where have you been, Jerry?"

"I'll tell you all about it, honey, while we're riding home—that is, if we're going home." With tantalizing daring she looked up at Steve and asked with exaggerated humility: "Am I to be permitted to return to the Double O in the care of Bruce—of Mr. Greyson's man, Mr. Courtlandt?"

Steve flushed darkly, but without answering led the way to the big touring car. The Jap sat behind the wheel in bronze immobility.

When Courtlandt had laid the rug over the knees of the two girls in the back seat, he closed the door and gave Ito his order:

"Drive Mrs. Courtlandt and Miss Glamorgan to the Double O as quickly as you can with safety. Jerry, in some way get word to Gerrish that I need him at Slippery Bend as soon as he can get here. I'll try

phoning from the hotel as well. The lines may be in order now."

"Aren't you coming with us, Steve?" Peggy's tone was aggrieved.

"No—I have Blue Devil here, and I'll ride out. Good night!"

He watched the red light on the departing automobile until it became a mere spark in the distance. Then he returned to the train.

He was still puzzling over the message Greyson had tried to get to Benson when he was hailed by Nelson, who stood near the step of the last car.

"Oh, Steve, get a hustle on! I've been waiting for you." Then, as Courtlandt stood beside him, Nelson added in a grave voice: "It's about Denbigh. When we lifted him, he—he went out like a candle. Never saw anything like it. They've taken the—him to the hotel. You'll have to notify the authorities, Steve. Simms shot him, and I hope they make that surly brute pay the piper. I'll give my testimony when they want it. Now I must get on with this train."

He sprang to the step of the car and seized the rail. Some of the train hands stood rigidly awaiting his signal. Courtlandt stepped back.

"Just a minute, Steve! Lord, I almost forgot to tell you. There is just one glint of humor in this infernally tragic night. It seems that our *Lochinvar* is Greyson, of the X Y Z Ranch. Don't know where that is—perhaps you do. His lady friend got the dope about this holdup, too. She rode to his place for help, and the two flivvered down the track to stop the train. She stood on the seat, grabbing his hair with one hand, while with the other she waved that fool lantern. I'll say she's some little sport!"

"But—but the elopement?"

"Lord, Steve, don't take this whole rotten business so to heart. You're livid. That elopement stuff is the glint. The girl had been told that there were traitors on the train. She knew Greyson's reason for flagging it mustn't be suspected, and just there the elopement excuse flashed into her mind. Said she reckoned that elopers were the only people who would do such a fool stunt. She told the maid about it, after things had quieted down. I'll say she's a peach! If I hadn't a perfectly good wife at home, she could have me. Happen to know who she is?"

"Yes—I happen to know. She is—she is Mrs. Stephen Courtlandt."

Nelson almost fell off the step.

"For the love of Mike! I don't wonder you're white. She—she was so *darned* convincing!"

With a chuckle, he swung forward and gave the signal to the waiting crew.

XXIII

As he made his way along the street in the starlight, Courtlandt felt as if he were traveling with his double. It was as if his shadow had suddenly developed a mind which occupied itself exclusively with thoughts of Jerry, leaving his own brain free to concentrate on the business ahead of him.

In a spirit of detachment he turned over and over her reason for the elopement announcement. He pictured her ride, and her furious indignation when the flesh and blood Steve had held her in his arms. There was nothing shadowy in Courtlandt's reaction to that memory.

The foyer of the ramshackle little hotel was filled with men, tobacco smoke, and the hum and buzz of excited voices—all but the space near one closed door. When they looked in that direction men spoke in whispers, and some of them dragged off their hats. It was as if the insensate wood had an aura of mystery and tragedy into which no person in the room cared or dared to penetrate.

Greyson was the first person to whom Courtlandt spoke.

"Bruce, I know now—"

With a smile, the elder laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Forget it, Steve! Had I been in your place, I couldn't have carried off the situation as well. I am glad that I stand exonerated of that unspeakable treachery. I—I only hope that later, when you learn—" Greyson cleared his throat and went on irrelevantly: "Who's to tell Mrs. Denbigh about her husband? After all, he was her husband. You were his friend. She'll take it better from you, Steve."

A furious protest rose to Courtlandt's lips, but he looked at the closed door and answered instead:

"Somebody's got to do it. I'll ride over to the X Y Z in the morning. There is no use in consulting her about any of the arrangements here. Has any one wired Denbigh's family for instructions?"

"No—we waited for you. You'd better get them on long distance. A train goes east at two o'clock in the morning."

"I understand. While I'm doing that, try to get the Double O on the phone, will you? Tell them to get Gerrish here as soon as possible."

"I will. The sheriff wants to see you at the jail, when you can manage it. He's sent a posse after Ranlett. The fellow is in or near that shack in Buzzard's Hollow—that is, he was."

"He's there, all right. I signaled with the rockets as Phil directed. He may be getting a little uneasy at the nonarrival of his bad men by this time, though. How the dickens did you know about it?"

"Beechy put a bullet into his leg. Jerry will tell you—"

"Beechy and Jerry!"

"Don't look like that, Steve! Jerry is safe, and Beechy has made good—gloriously good. Get the little girl to tell you about it. She's a wonder! Meanwhile the sheriff is waiting for you. He wants to talk to you about Simms. There can be no doubt that he shot Denbigh, and the sheriff wants your deposition. Perhaps it is a cold-blooded way to look at it, but I can't help thinking that with Simms out of the way his wife and kids will have a chance at real living. That's an awful indictment of a man, isn't it?"

It was morning when Courtlandt dismounted in the corral of the Double O, Slowman hurried up to take Blue Devil. The two men talked in low tones, while dawn streaked the sky in rosy peaks and the stars paled. The grass glittered with diamond-like dew, and the fairies had spread their squares of gossamer everywhere. The boys had come in with the shorthorns, the corral boss reported—not one was missing. The outfit had got news of the affair at Devil's Holdup, and were hopping mad that they hadn't had a chance to clean up Ranlett and his gang.

After the turmoil of the last few hours the ranch house seemed strangely quiet as Courtlandt entered the living room. The night air had been keen, and a few coals, like observant red eyes, glowed at him from the hearth.

Scheherazade, the white Persian cat, accupied the wing chair. She opened her topaz eyes wide as Steve approached the mantel, and watched unblinkingly as he

laid his arms upon it and looked up at the portrait above him. He spoke softly, as if he and the smiling woman were comrades and confidants.

"They said that Phil went out like a candle, mother. Where did he go? Where are you? It can't be the end! If it were, I shouldn't feel as if you were with me wherever I am. Was I a brute to Jerry? Will she ever forgive me? Would you, if you were in her place?"

The tender eyes must have reassured him, for with a husky "Good night, Betty Fairfax!" he straightened his shoulders and turned away.

For an instant he stood looking across the room. As he went toward his own door, he whistled softly his favorite "Papillons." Scheherazade craned her ruffed white neck to follow the sound, her eyes narrowed to ruby slits. The coals on the hearth crumbled and fell. She sprang to the back of the chair and listened. Across the room a door had latched softly.

Out in Buzzard's Hollow a white-faced, haggard-eyed man was turning over his three prisoners to the deputy sheriff. Overhead a great bird hung motionless for an instant as he glared down at the curious creature, with mammoth wings outspread, that lay below.

XXIV

BREAKFAST in the court was a late affair on the morning after the holdup. Steve did not appear. Tommy had given Jerry a sketchy account of his adventure of the night before, minimizing his part in it. Ming Soy hovered about the table with what in an Occidental would be tearful devotion.

The world was as clean and fresh and sweet as wind and rain and sunshine could make it. Faintly from the corral came the voices of riders coming and going; the skip and cough and stutter of tractors drifted in on the breeze. Benito, with much fluttering and shivering and croaking, was taking his matutinal plunge in the basin of the fountain. Goober lay beside Jerry's chair, his tawny eyes fixed unblinkingly on the parrot, his tongue hanging, his white teeth gleaming.

Jerry, wearing a pink and white frock that suggested the daintiness of morning-glories, had been absorbed in the thoughts induced by Tommy's story. It was some time before she became conscious of the

obstinate silence maintained by the usually talkative Peg, who was a bit more bewilderingly lovely than ever in a frock just a trifle less blue than the sky above her.

Benson was tenderly solicitous of the younger sister's comfort. Would she have more honey? Hopi Soy had broken his own record with the waffles—sure she wouldn't try one? Peg answered all such questions with an indifferent shake of her head.

Jerry observed the two in silence for a few moments before she protested:

"Don't grovel, Tommy! I don't know what you've done to displease her royal highness, but, knowing you as I do, I'm sure that it was nothing to warrant such rudeness. 'Fess up, children—what has happened?"

"You may think it's funny, Jerry," flared Peg indignantly; "but if you had been—been—"

"Say it! Tell the gentlemen of the jury just what happened, Miss Glamorgan," prompted Benson in a judicial tone, and with a glint in his blue eyes. "You won't"—as the girl responded only with a glance of superb scorn. "Then I will!"

He disregarded her startled "Don't dare!" and announced:

"I—I kissed her yesterday, Mrs. Steve!"

"I won't stay to hear!"

"Yes, you will!" He caught Peggy gently but firmly by the shoulders, and stood behind her as he explained: "You see, I want—I intend to marry your sister, Mrs. Steve. Yesterday I staked my claim. I kissed her once!"

"H-m! Squatter rights!" remarked Peggy angrily.

"Only once! Are you sure, Tommy?"

Jerry's voice was grave, but there was a traitorous quiver of her vivid lips as she asked the question.

"Only once, on honor! I told her that I should never do it again until she gave me permission. I meant it. I know that she's young. I expect to wait until—"

Peggy twisted herself free from the restraining hands on her shoulders. Half-way across the court she turned. Her hazel eyes were brilliant with laughter and her lips curved tormentingly as she flouted the two at the table.

"I hate—quitters!" she flung at Benson, before she disappeared in the path which led to the office.

Tommy followed her with his eyes, then turned to Jerry.

"I always watch where my ball falls, so that I can find it quickly," he explained. The assurance had drained from his voice when he asked: "What—what do you think of my pronunciamento? Will your father stand for it, Mrs. Steve?"

"If you and Peg decide that you really care for each other, he will have to," encouraged Jerry gravely.

"Peg has told me how he feels about family. Mine is the finest ever, but we don't date back to Colonial days on this continent. I suppose we must have existed somewhere before we came to this country. We couldn't have been prestidigitated out of the everywhere into the here, could we? There is plenty of money behind us, but—but that angel girl thinks I'm poor!"

"Don't enlighten her. Let her think so. It may make her kinder. When the time comes, I'll talk with dad. I'm with you heart and soul, Tommy, but I'm afraid you have a long road to travel before Peg says yes."

"You are wasting your sympathy. 'I scorn to change my state with kings!'" he declaimed dramatically, before he disappeared into the path which had swallowed up Peggy.

Jerry rested her elbows on the table, her chin on her clasped hands, and gazed thoughtfully after him. Subconsciously she noted the sound of horses' hoofs on the hard road in front of the house. Who was arriving at ten o'clock in the morning, she wondered idly?

Then she returned to thoughts of Peg and Tommy. She sat motionless for so long that Goober rose, stretched, and poked his cold nose under her hands. She stroked his head gently.

"Where is your master?" she whispered into one of his big ears.

The dog shook his head, sneezed violently, and looked up, his eyes eloquent with reproach.

"Did it tickle? I'm sorry!" She reached for a lump of sugar in the Dutch silver bowl. "If you could say please—"

Goober rose on his hind feet, dangled his crossed forepaws, and with head on one side avidly regarded the enticing white morsel in the girl's fingers. He gave a short, sharp bark. She tossed him the sugar and patted his head while he crunched it between his strong teeth.

"Do you know, Goober, I think that almost any dog is more interesting than the average human. Wait here for me. I'll get my hat, and we'll take Patches a lump of sugar."

Obediently the dog took up his position beside her chair. Humming lightly, Jerry went toward the house. What a glorious morning! The nightmare of yesterday already seemed like an impossible dream. Some day she would explain that elopement business to Steve, and they would laugh about it together. She caught her breath as a vision of his face when he held her in his arms crowded itself into her mind.

She raced up the court steps to elude her clamorous thoughts. At the door of the living room she stopped as if galvanized. She brushed her hand impatiently across her eyes. Coming into the shadowy room from the gleaming world outside certainly did queer things to one's vision. That—that couldn't be Steve with a woman's arms about his neck!

There was an inarticulate sound in Jerry's throat as she took a step forward. Courtlandt heard it. With a muttered imprecation he loosened the clinging arms. His face was white, his eyes were inscrutable as they met Jerry's.

"Felice, here is Mrs. Courtlandt. I have been telling Mrs. Denbigh of her husband's—"

"Steve forgets that I haven't had a husband for several years," the woman beside him interrupted. "I confess the news was a shock. I had no idea he was in this part of the country. I suppose that detestable Fairfax man knew it when he suggested to Bruce Greyson that he should invite me here for the summer. Does that surprise you, Steve?" she asked, as Courtlandt stifled an exclamation.

At last Jerry produced an apology for a voice.

"If—if I can do anything to help you—"

"Thank you, no," returned Felice. "Steve is all I need. He is such a comfort! Would any one else have had the sympathetic understanding to wait until he thought I would be awake before coming with such news to the X Y Z? But I came here to help him. I have had his happiness on my mind since I found this on the bench outside the door, just after Mr. Greyson had received a mysterious summons."

She held out Steve's campaign hat, with its black and gold cord and the band of silver filigree which Jerry had added the day before. There was malice thinly disguised with solicitude in the tone in which she added:

"I understood that—that you and he had gone—"

"Felice, cut that out! When I want your intervention in my affairs, I'll ask for it!" Courtlandt's tone lashed. "Now that you have returned the hat, you may go. Greyson has made arrangements for you to leave on the eastbound train in the early afternoon. Your maid is packing for you."

"But why should I go East, Steve? Phil Denbigh was nothing to me, while you—"

Her tone was drenched with significance. She looked defiantly at Jerry, who was struggling to retain her self-control. Her eyes burned and the pulses in her throat throbbed. She knew that if she opened her lips it would be to hurl words at Felice of which she would be utterly ashamed later, that if she unclenched her hands it would be to strike the mocking woman. She was terrified at the tumult that shook her.

Without a glance toward the two near the window, she crossed the room, entered her boudoir, and closed the door behind her. She leaned against it and listened. She heard the front door close. Then came footsteps on the porch, voices, then the sound of horses' hoofs. They had gone!

With the realization, something inside her seemed to crash. The barrier of ice which she had erected between her heart and Steve was swept away in a surge of passionate emotion. She knew now why she had been so terrified last night, when she heard that a man had been wounded. She had feared it might be Steve!

She knew why she had been so furiously angry at Felice, and why it had hurt so intolerably to see her in Steve's arms. It wasn't because she thought him false and untrue—it was because she loved him!

With a confused consciousness that she must escape from her own thoughts, she ran into the living room. She and Goober would take that sugar to Patches, and then—

The smiling, tender eyes of the portrait over the fireplace drew her like a magnet. She crossed her arms on the mantel and smiled back at them valiantly.

"Mother!" she implored breathlessly. "Mother!"

Comforted in some inexplicable way, she dropped her head on her arms. In retrospect, she went back to that evening in her father's apartment when she and Steve had entered into their matrimonial engagement. He had staked his future for money, she for social advancement.

Old Nick had been right—how could a man love or respect a girl who would marry for position? Now that Felice was really free, not merely legally free, would Steve—

Absorbed in her thoughts, she was conscious of nothing in the room till she heard Courtlandt's voice behind her announcing authoritatively:

"I have something to say to you, Jerry."

To the girl's taut nerves it was the voice of the conqueror laying down terms of surrender and clemency. In a flash she was back in the library of Courtlandt Manor, hearing Steve's cool, determined voice declare:

"I shall consider myself in a position to dictate terms to at least *one* member of the family."

If he had meant separation then, what would he mean now, with her silly words of the night before, about an elopement, to infuriate him? Was he about to reproach her again for that? Felice had supplied the last shred of evidence he needed when she produced the hat, if he needed more than her own statement to the brakeman to convict her.

Her anger flamed. He shouldn't get a chance to indict her! To put one's opponent on the defense meant a strategic advantage. Before he could speak she flared:

"You can't reproach me for last night, Steve," she flared out, before he could speak, "after what I saw when I came into this room. Honors are even!" she added flippantly.

He caught her by the shoulders and looked steadily into her angry eyes. They met his defiantly.

"After last night and—and this morning, Jerry, do you still want to go on with it?" he said gravely.

"Go on with it? Do you mean our comedy of marriage? Why not? 'Rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.' Please let me go, Steve!"

Courtlandt's grip on her shoulders tightened. His face was white. There was a

rigidity about his jaws which should have warned her.

"Flippancy won't save you. You are to listen to me now, girl!"

"While you boast to me again, as you did last night, that you never make love to any other woman? Not a chance!" She twisted away from him and gained the threshold of her own room. "Don't let me keep you from your alluring—friend," she flung back at him, before she closed and locked her door on the inside with grating emphasis.

Then she listened, with her hands clasped tight over her heart. The anger which was so foreign to her character had been a mere flash in the pan. Already she was sorry, humiliated, and ashamed.

She had always maintained that a girl who could not keep her temper, who wrangled, belonged in the quarter where shrewish women with shawls over their heads fought and brawled. Hadn't she seen them in her childhood? And she—she who thought herself superior—hadn't been much better under the skin. She could have scratched Felice's eyes out, and as for Steve—

What was he doing now? It was very quiet in the other room. Had he gone? Why couldn't she listen to his explanation and assumed a friendliness which this new, disturbing riot in her veins made impossible as a reality?

Her eyes, which still smarted with unshed tears, traveled around the dainty, chintz-hung boudoir. In a detached way, she noted that the one picture on the wall, which served as the keynote to the color scheme of the room, needed straightening. She must speak to Ming Soy.

"Open the door, Jerry!" commanded a stern voice outside the door.

Her heart leaped to her throat and then did a tail spin to her toes. She stood rigid, motionless.

"Open the door!"

There was an undercurrent in Courtlandt's words which seemed to paralyze her muscles.

"Jerry, if you don't open the door at once, I shall break it in!" he threatened in a voice the more compelling because of its repression.

The shake he gave the barrier between them broke the spell which held the girl. She turned the key and flung open the door.

With a sudden fierce movement he caught her hands. As she struggled to free them, she had a confused sense of flinging herself against an inflexible, determined will. She met his steady, dominant eyes.

"Steve! What—what *rank* melodrama! Are you qualifying for the movies?" She essayed a nonchalant tone, which to her hypercritical senses seemed horribly frightened. "What—what do you want?"

"That door open, and nothing else—just now," Courtlandt answered, as he dropped her hands and turned away.

XXV

"WHAT shall we do this afternoon, Jerry?" Peggy Glamorgan asked.

Peggy, her sister, and Benson sat at luncheon three hours later. The table was spread on the broad, shadowy veranda on the north side of the ranch house. The sun beat down upon fields and white roads. Insects droned lazily to the accompaniment of the faint roar of the stream, swollen by the heavy rain of the night before.

"Ye gods! If here isn't Abdul the Great!" she mocked saucily, as Courtlandt appeared at the door. "Are his humble slaves to be honored with his presence at the noonday meal? Jerry, aren't you overwhelmed at this tribute to our charms?"

"Can't a man lunch beneath his own vine and fig tree without creating a panic? From now on I shall make it a daily rite, to get you used to it," Steve laughed. He laid his hand on Benson's shoulder. "Tommy, you're a hero! Slippery Bend is agog with admiration. What the populace can't think of to say in praise of you the deputy sheriff supplies in the most colorful vernacular the locality produces. Don't run—I won't say any more about it," he ended as Benson, fiery red, half rose from his chair.

Steve seated himself opposite Jerry. She observed him resentfully from behind a screen of lashes. He looked more carefree and debonaire than she had ever seen him, while her heart still contracted suffocatingly at any thought of the morning. It was just like a man! Nothing went very deep, she thought.

Ming Soy fluttered about in devoted anticipation of the master's needs. Peggy poured cream into his tea with a lavish hand. Benson laughed.

"You're a wonderful tactician, old dear! You let your light shine upon us but seldom, and behold the devotion when you do appear! Your beatific expression would put the twinkle-twinkle-little-star effect out of business. Got a load off your mind, haven't you? Slowman tells me that the shorthorns are back to a hoof, that our temperamental former manager is being securely if not luxuriously accommodated with quarters in the jail, and that—that Mrs. Denbigh is *en route* to the effete East. Is my information correct?"

Tommy stole a surreptitious glance at Jerry, who, with the aid of a pink-tipped finger, was nonchalantly sailing rose-petal boats on the sea of her crystal finger bowl.

"It is," responded Courtlandt. "The tangle of the last few months is straightening out. The late unpleasantness has resulted in one thing—we have an all-American outfit on the Double O Ranch on whose honor I'd stake my last dollar. They may come of varied and contending races, but they're united when it comes to ideals of service and loyalty to the United States. Next week I'm going to Uncle Nick's camp in the mountains to inspect the silver mine, and incidentally to fish. There's a lake there where the trout are so thick that they form bread lines to get a chance at the bait."

"You tell 'em!" jeered Benson.

"It's a fact. I want to shake the memory of the last two months, to get away so that I can come back and make a fresh start. I'll leave you in charge of the ranch, Tommy."

"When Cæsar commands, 'Do this,' it is performed."

"What's on for this afternoon? Let's do something. I want to get yesterday out of my mind."

"Miss Glamorgan and I thought—I thought—that if you didn't need me, we'd ride over to Buzzard's Hollow. That spot seems to be occupying stage center now. I'll personally conduct you and Mrs. Steve over the abandoned aeroplane, if you'll come with us."

Jerry tried to control a shudder. She wondered if she could ever again hear the name of the hollow without seeing a close-up of Beechy and Ranlett and that mutilated calf. She sensed Courtlandt's quick look at her, and answered hurriedly:

"Don't count me in. I sha'n't ride again until—until I have forgotten the hours I spent in the saddle yesterday."

Buzzard's Hollow as an objective leaves me cold. If no one else wants the roadster, I shall drive over to the B. C. to inquire for Mrs. Carey. Mother Eagan may allow me to see the baby."

Jerry could have cheerfully bitten out her too confiding tongue an hour later, when she found Steve waiting beside the roadster at the front door. He had changed from his usual riding togs to sport clothes. He reddened under her surprised eyes.

"Have you gone saddle-shy, too?" she asked flippantly, to conceal her frightened suspicion that he was going with her.

"No, but I must see Beechy, and as you were going to Bear Creek I thought we'd go along together."

"But—I would rather—"

"Get in, please! It will take time to get to the B. C. by the road in this car, which is far from being the last word in speed-limit violators."

With teeth set in her lips to steady them, Jerry stepped into the roadster. What motive was behind Steve's decision to accompany her, she wondered, as the car shot smoothly ahead under his skillful driving?

She regarded him covertly from under the brim of her rose-colored hat. He was gazing straight ahead, his brows knit in a slight frown. The silence between them seemed heavy with portent. She must say something. From far off came a faint whistle.

"Is that the East-bound train?" she asked, and then wished fervently that she hadn't.

"Yes—just pulling out of Slippery Bend. Felice is on it. Jerry, I want you to understand that the situation you stumbled on this morning was merely some of her theatrical claptrap. When I told her about Phil, she flung herself into my arms and pretended to be overcome."

"Don't apologize!" the girl mocked. Then, as she caught a dangerous gleam in his eyes, she abandoned thin ice. "Has Mr. Denbigh—"

"I got Phil's family on long distance soon after midnight. Gerrish took him—went East in the early morning."

"Was he a dear friend of yours?"

"No—he was in my class at college, but I never knew him well. While the rest of us were in athletics, he was devoting himself to his violin. We thought him indifferent, but I understand now that his position just corroded his sensitive heart."

"Position? Wasn't he of the elect?"

"Sarcasm doesn't suit you, Jerry. Phil's father and mother were among the great army of incompatibles. His heritage of misery as the child of divorced parents, tossed back and forth between their habitations, ruined his life; but he made royally good at the last, poor chap."

Jerry blinked furiously to rid her eyes of the tears which had flooded them at his tone. They rode on in silence. The road ran through the fragrant, chill quiet of dense pines, which swayed and creaked a mournful note in the slight breeze. When they emerged into the willow-fringed, sun-dappled road again, Courtlandt spoke.

"I want you to tell me everything that happened yesterday, Jerry. I—I know now that that elopement stuff was all a bluff, but—but it was an infernally dangerous one. It was lucky for Greyson that an interest bigger than any individual was concerned in last night's work, or—but forgive me for my lack of faith, and tell me what happened—won't you, girl?"

Jerry snatched at her stampeding composure and dragged it back. Her answer was tantalizingly slow.

"That 'won't you' was diplomatic, Steve. If you had demanded an explanation, I wouldn't have said a word. Where shall I begin?"

She saw his jaw set at her levity, but he had his voice well in hand as he answered:

"At the beginning."

"Only on condition that there are no interruptions!"

"Then be merciful, and tell your story quickly."

Jerry began the recital of her adventures with her determination to amuse Peggy. She forgot herself, she was quite unconscious of the unevenness of Courtlandt's driving, as the story unrolled of its own momentum. He did not interrupt with words, but at times the car shot forward as if propelled by a furious impulse.

They passed Jim Carey herding some lank-bodied, big-kneed calves before him. He waved and shouted a greeting. As they neared the cottonwoods by the Bear Creek corral, Jerry described the culmination of the wild ride on the track, and her stunned amazement when she heard Steve's furious exclamation behind her. Her voice was traitorously unsteady as she added:

"Oh, you of little faith! Even when I saw you there, and knew that you had

heard what I said to the brakeman, I thought that—that somehow you would understand."

"Why should I? You had told me that you had been engaged to Greyson. One never knows what a man will do when he is mad about a woman—when he loves her crown of shining hair, her eyes, her smile, the—the tip of her bare pink foot!"

Memory sent a surge of red to Steve's face as he brought the car to a stop in front of the shack.

His words had set Jerry's heart beating a furious call to arms. What had he meant? Who was mad about a woman—he or Greyson? Whose bare pink foot? Involuntarily she tucked one suede shoe under her, and her cheeks flushed warmly. He—he couldn't have meant her!

XXVI

IN the living room of the cabin Jerry held the cocoon of soft flannel, which in turn held the Carey baby, in her arms. She laid her soft cheek against his.

"Isn't he the dearest?" she crooned, as she felt the sweet, warm thrill of his satin-soft skin against her face.

Doc Rand, before the fireplace, flapping his long black coat tails in time to his heel-and-toe teeter, blinked at her through lenses which had become unaccountably misty. His russet apple face showed a new set of lines.

"I'm so glad that he arrived safely!" Jerry observed innocently, punctuating the words with cooing sounds directed at the crease in the baby's neck.

Indignation at the possible slur on his professional skill served as a safety valve for Rand's emotion, which had been so unaccountably stirred by the sight of the lovely girl with the child in her arms. He had seen the same thing—a woman with her face snuggled against a baby's—hundreds of times before without being moved by it.

"Arrived safely! Why shouldn't he arrive safely in a home like this? Take it from me, the Almighty's going to pick his mothers carefully from now on. He's just had a demonstration of what ought not to happen in poor Denbigh's case. He'll find a way to make women realize what a great and glorious privilege it is to be the mother of an American citizen!"

"Of a citizen of either sex?" probed the girl mischievously.

"You've said it! The female of the species has got to take her share in our national responsibilities. If we have another war—God grant we don't!—the young women will be drafted to work, just as the men will be drafted to fight. There'll be no feminine slackers next time."

"Hear, hear!" applauded a low voice from the door.

Doc Rand turned to beam paternally at the newcomer.

"Steve, you scoffer, come in! Take a look at what your wife has in that bundle."

Jerry wished she were a thousand miles away when Steve loomed over her, but she didn't intend to let him suspect it. She pulled away the soft blanket to let him see better, and challenged breathlessly:

"Isn't he a sweetie peach?"

"Isn't he—it—very red?" Courtlandt stammered, in honest embarrassment that he could not conscientiously voice a pæan in praise of the beauty of the Carey heir.

Doc Rand indulged in a denatured guffaw.

"Lord, Steve, your mental propeller showered sparks of originality that time, didn't it? That's what a man always says about a new baby, and I've heard one of your cowboys express it much better than you did. 'Cripes!' he said. 'That kiddo has a boiled lobster licked to a standstill!' The baby isn't appreciated here—you'd better take him back to his mother, Mrs. Eagan," the doctor concluded, as the nurse, beaming with full moon effulgence, entered the room.

Jerry smiled up at the portly woman as she laid the little bundle in her arms.

"Tell Mrs. Carey that he's the loveliest baby I ever saw!" she whispered.

"What do you think about Beechy, doc?" Courtlandt asked, as Mrs. Eagan left the room.

"He'll pull through, now that he has eased his conscience by confession. I had to let him talk and unburden his mind before I could heal his body."

"If it hadn't been for Denbigh, he would have been in on that deal last night."

"Yes, Steve, but Beechy was out of the holdup for good when he found that it was government money they were after. He was prepared to take what was coming to him for quitting, too. He knew mighty well that a man couldn't double-cross Ranlett and live—that is, not if Ranlett knew it. He knows now that Denbigh saved

him. Beechy isn't bad at heart. He and a lot of others like him are suffering from an acute attack of disillusionment, that's all. They'd been fed up on 'hail-the-conquering-hero' stuff, and when the shouting was over, and they spent weary months in hospital forgotten by the world at large, and in particular by the female portion of it that coddled them during the war, do you wonder that they were ready for any deviltry that was afoot? I don't. You see, in spite of his loud talk, when Beechy came slam up against the proposition of defrauding his government—ungrateful government that he thought it—there was nothing doing. He'll never be able to do much hard work, but there must be a place for him."

"A place for him! If he ever escapes my clutches again, he's more slippery than I think him!"

"Go to it, Steve! Even you and I sa-laam when he speaks in that tone, don't we, Mrs. Jerry?"

The sun had dropped behind the mountains, and fields and foothills lay luminous and still, as Courtlandt drove the roadster past the corral at the Double O. A bunch of horses were being turned into the pastures for the night feed. They nipped, they kicked, they rolled. The riders who were driving them out tolerated their antics patiently, with an occasional admonitory "Hi-yew!"

Jerry turned to look after them.

"I wish Peg could have seen that! In this light, in their broad-brimmed hats, their colored neckerchiefs, and their gloves, their costumes are certainly picturesque. They would have satisfied even her craving for local color."

Courtlandt drove on to the ranch house without answering. It had been a silent ride. When they started, Jerry was tensely apprehensive of what might be coming; but as the man beside her drove on steadily, with only an occasional inquiry as to her comfort, she had relaxed and allowed her thoughts to drift.

Steve followed her into the living room. As she opened the door of her boudoir, he spoke from where he stood under his mother's portrait.

"Come here, Jerry—please!" he added with a smile, as she hesitated.

"I must dress for dinner. I—"

"There is plenty of time. I want to talk to you. Come here!"

As a safe and sane compromise, she took refuge behind the back of the wing chair. "Well?" she queried defensively.

With startling suddenness he caught her hands and drew her to the hearth beside him.

"That's better! I can't talk to you when you are so far away." His grip on her hands tightened. "Jerry, do you remember that day at the manor when Uncle Nick's will was read?"

"The day we decided to come to Wyoming? It has proved an adventure, hasn't it?" she said, in a breathless attempt to gain time.

Courtlandt ignored her question.

"You asked me if I wanted his fortune. Do you also remember my answer?"

She nodded assent.

"More than I ever wanted anything—except one thing—in my life." Steve repeated his own words. "You thought that that one thing was Felice, and I—I let you think so. I meant you, Jerry! No—you can't go! You've got to listen now. We've been playing at cross purposes long enough. I wanted Uncle Nick's money because I wanted to be rid of the humiliating load of obligation we Courtlandts had shouldered. I wanted to meet you on equal terms. I loved you the first time I saw you in your shimmering orchid gown, with the great fan which you wielded with the air of an empress. Who was I to tell you so? You wouldn't have believed me—you would have despised me as a hypocrite. I had no money, nothing but debts to offer you. But believe me, if I hadn't loved you, nothing could have forced me, nothing could have tempted me, to ask you to marry me. On the way in to meet you that first night I promised Sir Peter that if in any way you were repellent to me, I would let your father take possession of our property. I—I—well, I had to bluff some to my father, going home, to cover up what I really felt. I don't ask for anything now. I only want a promise that you won't close your heart against me, that you will—oh, you *must* love me!"

The girl looked down upon the head pressed against her hands, then up at the tender eyes of the woman above the mantel. Were they misted, or were there tears in her own eyes?

She choked back a sound that was half laugh, half sob, as she replied with tantalizing charm:

"Of course, when you say 'must'—"

"It's your own fault, Mr. Tommy Benson! I told you that I shouldn't—"

It was Peggy's voice at the door. In embarrassed haste Jerry freed herself from Courtlandt's arms. He caught her hands and drew her back.

"About that honeymoon I promised you, Mrs. Courtlandt—do you think I could interest you in an old silver mine up in the mountains?"

XXVII

THE two men were in striking contrast. Glamorgan, massive, shrewd-eyed, a man of big affairs and world interests, and Peter Courtlandt, the cultured patrician who dwelt largely in the realm of books and art, were smoking on the terrace of the manor.

They could look down the box-bordered paths of the garden to where stone steps led to a small landing on the shore of the river. A tender swung at its mooring. Motor boats and steamboats plied busily back and forth on the water, which rippled into scales of gold. From a man-of-war anchored downstream came the sound of a ship's band.

The sun was setting with lavish prodigality of color, spreading great swaths of crimson and gold and violet above the hills. One steady, brilliant star shone in the west. From the garden drifted the scent of heliotrope. The light breeze stirred the awning over the terrace, gently lifted the soft rings of white hair on Peter Courtlandt's head, and impertinently flicked the sheets of the letter in Glamorgan's hand.

Courtlandt withdrew his eyes from the river and looked at his guest. The large man was smiling broadly—at his thoughts, doubtless, for his eyes were fixed unseeing-ly on the star. His host suddenly remembered that he had not seen the oil king smile like that since Jerry and Steve had left the manor.

Glamorgan had appeared like a man spiritually burdened. Could his furious indignation because his daughter had gone West with her husband have accounted for his gravity?

Courtlandt tossed the remains of his cigar over the terrace wall and addressed his companion.

"You said you had a letter to read to me," he suggested.

Glamorgan's eyes flashed to his. Was there a hint of tears in them? The smile on the oil king's lips spread and spread until his host was reminded of the moon in all the glory of its fullness. He laughed in sympathy.

"It must be an amusing letter, to judge by your expression," he said.

Glamorgan indulged in a throaty chuckle, which sounded like the delight of a boy in some satisfactorily accomplished bit of mischief.

"It isn't the letter that's so amusing, though I'll hand it to Peg when it comes to expressing herself with a punch. It's what I can read between the lines. Listen to what she writes, and you'll get what I mean."

He settled huge horn-rimmed eyeglasses in place and began to read from the letter in his hand:

DEAR DAD:

By this time you must have received my letter about the near holdup. I penned that throbbing epistle on the morning after our return from Slippy Bend, when my mind was a red-hot molten mass of thrills.

Well, to quote Scripture—don't give me the credit of this, for Tommy Benson reeled it off when I expressed amazement at what was happening, and I copied it from the Bible—"there be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not—the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

It is that last phrase that has to do with the situation here. When I first came, Steve had about as much expression in his face when he looked at Jerry as a piece of granite has. Jerry was as bad. They were the nearest to cold-storage newlyweds that I had ever seen.

Now—ye gods!—when I look up and see Steve's eyes on Jerry, my heart stampedes. I feel as if I had made the unpardonable break of opening a closed door without knocking. Jerry behaves a little better. She keeps her eyes to heel, but her voice—"the devil hath not in all his quiver's choice an arrow for the heart like a sweet voice." Tommy Benson again! He is a more liberal education than an English course at college. I asked him if the lines were Shakespeare or the Bible, and he said that a gentleman named Byron wrote them, but that I was not to cultivate his acquaintance indiscriminately. I have sent East for all of Mr. Byron's poems.

But I digress. To return to Steve and Jerry, they start on a camping trip to-morrow, up into the wilderness, to inspect some silly old silver mine. Steve has sent Marcelle O'Neil ahead with pack horses, guns, provisions, and rods.

Thank Heaven, they didn't ask me to go. I'm to stay at the Double O with Tommy Benson's mother, who arrived yesterday. She's a stylish stout of about fifty, with wonderful skin and teeth, and eyes that make you feel you'd like to

drown in them, they are so like blue pools. Her hair is like dull gold, and her smile—well, I walked straight into her arms when she turned it on me.

I wrote you that Jerry seems terribly short of money. You *must* do something about it. Her Tiffany man has found an alexandrite that she wants. When I told her the price, a miserable little two thousand dollars, you would have thought I'd mentioned the amount of the Allied war debt. Why don't you send her the ring?

From my limited observation—there's been something doing every minute since I set foot on the Double O—I should say that ranching is a great life when the coyotes don't steal your chickens, when your shorthorns don't break away, and when a disgruntled fragment of your outfit doesn't shoot up the neighborhood.

Jerry says that she and Steve will spend their winters at the manor after they have been here a year. This has something to do with Uncle Nick's will—you probably know about it. Steve will take Tommy Benson into partnership, and he will be manager-in-chief. It's a great chance for Tommy. He is the poor-man-with-a-future type. He's supersensitive about his lack of money, though.

From my window I can see Sandy's flivver in the distance. Sandy is the carrier, and I must wind up this letter *pronto*. Heaps of love!

PEG.

P. S.—Praise be! Careful Cosmetics has departed. That's what I call the Denbigh woman.

Glamorgan removed his glasses and threw back his head with a chuckling laugh. Courtlandt laughed with him.

"Peggy certainly wields a facile pen. I am glad of what she writes about Steve and Jerry. I confess that I feared—"

"I want to talk to you about that, Courtlandt," interrupted Glamorgan eagerly. "It has taken all my strength of will not to take you into my confidence, but I promised your brother-in-law that—"

"Nicholas Fairfax?"

"I don't wonder that you are astonished. You see, I liked him from the moment when I saw him. I'd known a lot of men like him—chestnut burrs outside, but sound and sweet in their hearts. He must have felt that I understood him, for he hadn't been at the manor long before he confided his doubts and hopes to me. Old Nick was keener than you or I. He hadn't been here twenty-four hours before he had sized up the situation between Jerry and Steve. He realized that they were heading straight for the matrimonial reefs where so many of their friends had come to grief. I guess he realized, too, that I was a little more anxious for that marriage to turn out a success than even he was. The Lord only knows what a heavy burden of guilt I

would have carried the rest of my life if it hadn't!"

"You wouldn't have been the only one."

"I know that, Courtlandt. Nick realized that he hadn't long to live. He felt sure of Jerry's loyalty, and believed that all that was needed to right matters between the two was to give Steve money and make the girl dependent on him. He knew the boy well enough to know that his pride would stand between them as long as Jerry was spending my money. That was where I came in. He had me cast for the stern parent act. I was to oppose Jerry's going to the ranch. Opposition, he figured, would steel her determination to go with her husband, if she was tempted to waver. I knew my girl better. I knew that she would keep the covenant, but I consented, to please old Nick. I almost gave in the day she went away, when I saw her watch the gate wistfully until the train started; but I kept out of sight."

"Who would have believed, to see Nick in those last days, that he was planning so shrewdly?"

"That wasn't all he planned. He had the dickens of a time with Greyson. He wanted him to invite Mrs. Denbigh to the X Y Z for the summer, as a sort of acid test for Steve."

"What a diabolical idea!"

"I'm not so sure of that. His argument was that if the woman had the slightest lure for Steve—"

"But she hadn't!" Courtlandt denied sharply.

"I couldn't see how she could have; but then vamps aren't in my line. Nick was possessed by the idea. Greyson kicked like a steer against it, but finally gave in. You can't tell—Fairfax may have had other reasons up his sleeve. Denbigh was at the Bear Creek Ranch. He might have thought, have hoped, that he and Felice would come together again. In spite of his ill health and his absorption in his ranch, your brother-in-law was a profound thinker on social and economic questions. I spent hours arguing with him. He contended that the great weakness of the American people lay in their lack of stability; that they could be swept along on a wave of enthusiasm, but that when it came to the steady tide of determination they wouldn't even tread water. Lack of stability, he believed, was at the root of the divorce habit, which, if it wasn't

checked, would insidiously undermine the character of the nation."

"He was right, but"—with a profound sigh of relief—"it looks as if Jerry and Steve had escaped the reefs, doesn't it?"

"I'm thankful to say that it does," replied Glamorgan. "Now you know why I was so much pleased with that letter of Peg's. The child didn't realize how she was easing my mind. I notice that she writes a good deal about that Benson boy, and I like what she says of him. Next to a man with family behind him, I have a deep and abiding respect for a man who has the best in literature at his tongue's end. He's a rare bird these days!"

"Then you wouldn't object if Peg and Tommy—"

"I don't care whom Peggy marries if he's a clean, upstanding fellow, with self-respect and sincere love for my girl. I'm through meddling, though I'm not sorry for what I did with Jerry. She stood nine chances out of ten of marrying a fortune hunter. Steve wasn't that—he had to be forcibly fed with money. In spite of that fact I haven't drawn an easy breath since

Nick told me his suspicions, until now." He glanced at the letter. "I think I'll send that alexandrite as a sort of peace offering."

"You're too late. Steve wired to me to have it sent."

"He did? Then you knew all I have been telling you?"

"No—I only put two and two together when I got Steve's message."

Glamorgan rose, shook himself like a bear, and extended his right hand to his host. His voice was curiously rough as he laid the other hand on Courtlandt's shoulder and confided awkwardly:

"Good night! I hope they'll name the first son Peter, Courtlandt!"

Courtlandt put his free hand on the big man's shoulder. His laugh was unsteady, but his voice was vibrant with feeling as he returned:

"And I hope they'll name the second one Daniel. Good night!"

They stood shaking hands, laughing boyishly, and patting each other's shoulders as the lights flashed up on the river and night rang down the curtain of dusk.

THE END

MAGIC OF THE MOON

THE clouds have built mysterious towers
 Around blue fields of night,
 Whereon the stars unfold like flowers
 For the Lady Moon's delight.
 A golden cry of light precedes,
 And herald night winds play,
 Blowing on wood wind pipes and reeds
 Before her on her way.

She rides the great road overhead
 Unhasting and alone,
 And holy silver peace is spread
 Like a sea around her throne.
 There spirits of the streams and lakes,
 All clothed in mystic white,
 Throng to the spell whereby she makes
 Enchantment of the night.

Gathering still, they overfill
 The shining valley rim
 And mount aloft from hill to hill
 Till the morning stars grow dim.
 Then swiftly from the empty sky
 The magic is withdrawn,
 And rose and saffron banners fly
 Along the road of dawn.

Charles Buxton Going

Sanderson's Scoop

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE MYSTERY THAT A SOUTH SEA
SCHOONER BROUGHT TO THE WATER FRONT
OF SAN FRANCISCO

By George Parsons West

SANDERSON, standing at the city desk and listening to his chief's instructions, scarcely tried, on that afternoon, to assume the alert professional interest with which a city editor's hunches should be greeted by followers of a trade that requires enthusiasm, enthusiasm, always enthusiasm.

Sanderson was bored—which means that he had about as much business in the city room of a newspaper as a modest man in politics. Like almost everything else they didn't like, his superiors blamed his mental condition on the war, from which their most promising reporter had returned with a decoration, a wound stripe, and a more or less profound apathy about anything that could possibly happen in or around San Francisco.

For several months the city editor had been assuring the managing editor that Sanderson would "come out of it" in time. Remembering their pride in him, their feeling of vicarious participation in the final battles of the war because he was in the thick of the fight, they managed to forgive the listlessness that showed in his copy to the extent of ruining several promising stories. They closed their eyes, or their noses, to the evidence that Sanderson was succumbing, on occasions, to the flattery and the apparently unlimited private stocks of a certain crowd of old toppers who had laid on this good-looking, high-spirited, brilliant boy the doubtful blessing of their favor.

There had been a conference about him at lunch that day.

"I know the symptoms perfectly," the managing editor had said. "Boys like Sanderson are attracted in the first place by the excitement of the game—by what our blasé and precocious youngsters know

these days as the 'kick.' That's a vicious word! Think of mere children comparing the things they get a kick out of and the things they don't, like a lot of jaded decadents! I believe that if my daughter got religious in the old-fashioned way, or fell genuinely in love, she'd tell about it in terms of the kick it gave her! But about Sanderson—the kick has worn off."

"It's too bad," returned the city editor. "He was the keenest man I had."

"It's too bad, but it was inevitable," the managing editor continued. "The war speeded up things in his case, but it would have come sooner or later. I've watched them go through this office for years. One of three things usually happens when they reach Sanderson's stage—either they take to drinking, blunt their edge for good and all, and become mere newspaper hacks; or they jump to New York and pull up under the spur of making good there; or they fall in love and marry, and go into training for the long pull that makes men and editors of them. I do wish the right girl would get hold of Sanderson! I don't want to lose him."

But they agreed that something had to be done, and before the city editor went back to his desk they had decided what that something should be.

Sanderson was due to report for the day at half past one, but it was two o'clock before the city editor, watching, saw him enter the city room and walk over to the mail box. His chief sent a copy boy for him, and Sanderson strolled over to the city desk.

The city editor ignored his brusque and almost surly nod, and handed him a tiny clipping, pasted in the middle of a sheet of copy paper. It was from the marine page

of the morning paper, and announced the arrival in port of the schooner Panther, Captain Tollefson, home port Hilo, with a cargo of six hundred tons of copra from the islands.

Sanderson studied it carefully. Obviously he couldn't get the chief's idea. Schooners like that were arriving every day.

"Go aboard her this afternoon and get a feature story," said the city editor. "Interview Captain Tollefson, and make him tell you something interesting. Try to imagine that the South Seas have just been discovered. We haven't had an island yarn in the paper for so long that a new one would be interesting. Smoke it up into a good story. We'll dress it up with pictures and a freak head for the third page tomorrow. Get the skipper to tell you about some island where the women do the proposing, or something like that. If it's worth it, I'll have Bert draw some comics. Stop on your way out at the art department for Burns."

Sanderson started off without speaking.

"Wait a minute!" called his chief. "I had a talk with the managing editor about you this noon. You know as well as we do that your work has been off for a long time. If you'll wake up and put some ginger and freshness into this assignment, you can bring us a real story—one of the kind that used to make us proud you were on the staff. That's the only kind we want, the only kind that will make it worth while to keep you on the paper. You get me, don't you?"

Sanderson, who had been staring down at the desk, met the other's eyes in a level, somber stare. He nodded, turned, and stalked off toward the door.

In spite of his gruff manner of speech, the city editor felt a twinge of genuine sympathy and regret.

"Confound the boy!" he muttered to himself. "He feels worse about it than we do; but he doesn't know what ails him!"

Sanderson poked his head in at the art department and shouted for Burns. Then he waited for the photographer in the hall, pacing back and forth moodily, and puffing viciously each time he exhaled a puff of cigarette smoke.

Burns emerged—a lean, stoop-shouldered man in spectacles, carrying his heavy newspaper camera and wearing his habitual air of a man who was beyond being surprised

or interested by anything that might happen in the course of a day's work. He had five youngsters, and was paying for a home across the bay, in West Berkeley.

"What's the orders, Jim?" he said.

"South Sea schooner—feature stuff. We'll take the North Beach car," said Sanderson listlessly. "She's anchored off Meiggs's Wharf. We'll get a launch to take us out."

It wasn't any reflection on the assignment that Burns listened without a flicker of interest and then trudged along after Sanderson in silence. It would have been the same if the reporter had told him that they were about to enter the cage of a man-eating tiger for a close-up, or to break through a police line to snapshot the King of England.

Sanderson, reflecting on this, and smiling over it in spite of himself, fell into deeper depression. He told himself that Burns, after all, had the only sensible attitude toward this crazy game of dressing up trifles for the amusement of the crowd, and shrieking in headlines over things that didn't matter. What did matter in these years of ebb tide in the affairs of men?

Ebb tide—that was it! Life was just a stinking tide flat from which the waters had receded, and there wouldn't be another flood tide in his day. Flat, stale, and unprofitable—*Hamlet* was right! The melancholy Dane said a mouthful!

Meiggs's Wharf, facing the sparkling bay where the city looks north over the water to the hills of Marin, spelled nothing to Sanderson that afternoon except depressing recollections of a glorious past. Sitting in the stern of the launch and looking back, he remembered the quaint little frame structure with its cupola, now replaced by the customs service with a neat, characterless cement building, and the low shack near by, at the edge of Fishermen's Wharf, where he and his friends had dined on sea food and claret, or even sparkling Burgundy, on pay days, in a past that now seemed infinitely remote.

Suddenly an orange scarf caught his eye. The scarf became a girl—a tall, lithe, rather stunning figure of a girl, standing there alone on the edge of the wharf, with her skirts whipping about her in the fresh wind. The scarf ends were flying out beyond her hair, which seemed loose and bobbed rather long, and of a light taffy color under her blue tam-o'-shanter.

Sanderson's heart, at sight of her, mocked the fraudulent little imp of a cynic in his brain by increasing its speed by a beat or two. His eyes, however, merely leveled themselves in lazy attention while a small dinghy with a gasoline engine sputtering in its stern shot around the corner of the wharf and drew alongside just below the girl. Sanderson saw a nondescript man in brown dungarees rise and give her a hand, which she scarcely touched as she jumped lightly into the stern.

The sputtering began again, and the dinghy came around until its bow pointed straight at the stern of their own launch. Then it held its course steady. At this Sanderson turned to face the bow, and directed his gaze out into the channel.

Only two hundred yards ahead of them lay the Panther, pulling back on her anchor cable as she lay in the flood tide, her sails furled, her black hull lying low in the water, and no sign of life about her deck. There wasn't another craft in that direction. The island schooner, Sanderson concluded, must be the girl's destination.

His professional habit asserted itself in his matter-of-course decision to get her and her orange scarf and yellow bobbed hair into the story. It solved the picture problem then and there. If that handsome girl's likeness wasn't good enough to dress up the third page or any other part of the stupid sheet, then the city editor was a crank for fair!

Sanderson recalled the days before the war, when, covering the water front as a cub with his fellow reporters, their technique on boarding a liner from China or Australia called for finding pretty girls first, getting pictures, and then turning up a story about them later. Any story would do if the girl was pretty enough!

He wondered what the dickens this one would be doing on board a smelly copra boat, and decided in the same instant that she was the skipper's daughter. She would appear in his story as an only daughter. His mind played lazily with the idea. He might make her the heiress of a cannibal island. If her dad was like most of these island skippers, he would spin any sort of yarn that was wanted.

Then Sanderson fell to wondering whether the old chap would bring out a bottle of island gin—perhaps even Scotch from Sydney, or French wine from Papeete. Five minutes later he clambered over

the side of the schooner, followed by Burns, and almost immediately the launch beneath them moved out of the way to make room for the dinghy.

II

A GLANCE about the deck showed Sanderson that it was deserted, and he turned to give the girl a hand over the side. It was a cool, slender hand, with strong, delicate fingers. The girl who followed it was strong and delicate, too. Sanderson got a sensation of a thoroughbred quality and vivid good looks, owing even more to youth and vitality than to her fetching golden hair and to what he afterward thought of as the clipperlike grace and smartness of her "lines."

"Thank you," she said, standing before him on the deck. "Is Captain Tollefson on board?"

"Is that your father? I don't know," said Sanderson.

A shadow of fear passed across the gray eyes, whose first frank glance had given Sanderson a galvanic shock of the sort no man so old and world-weary as he imagined himself could possibly feel. She stared at him now, while the shadow changed to a wide-eyed alarm.

"You're not a—a minister, are you?" she said.

Sanderson laughed.

"Guess again!" he said. "I'm a newspaper man; but I don't bite," he told her, as she drew back a step and glanced back and forth between him and the skylight of the cabin at the stern of the schooner. She was plainly frightened now. "I'm here to get the story of your life—and your father's," added Sanderson flippantly.

It was his turn to be startled now. Her eyes incredulous, doubt fighting with some spark of hope that gave them a new loveliness, she stepped up to him and stared into his eyes.

"Did you know my father?" she said. Her low voice had a breathless, wondering note. Her long, slender fingers were working with an end of the orange scarf. "Tell me you knew him!" she pleaded. "Tell me you know it isn't so, that it can't be so, that you won't let it be so!"

Sanderson never knew whether his innate love of honesty or the craft of his trade would have conquered there on the deck before the frightened pleading of her eyes. She wheeled suddenly at a noise

from the cabin. He followed her gaze, and saw a man appear around the corner of the skylight, drawn on deck by the sound of their voices.

Burns, meanwhile, had been stolidly unlimbering his camera and peering at the girl through near-sighted eyes whose dullness showed only a bored and professional interest in ways and means of getting photographs. He stood peering down into the box as he leveled it at the girl. His unvarying method, when it wasn't a mere press-agent stunt, was to take no chances. He intended to "shoot" at least one film before Sanderson got started. He mistrusted the foolish courtesy that sometimes cropped up even in the best and most experienced of reporters. One glance at the girl was all he needed in order to feel perfectly sure that one good print of this vivid young woman would square him with the city desk, so far as the present assignment was concerned.

The man emerging from the cabin had seen Burns an instant before the photographer looked up in disgust as the girl turned her back on his camera to face the skylight. What the newcomer's appearance had been before that Sanderson had not had time to perceive. What he was now, enraged by the sight of the camera, and bearing down on Burns with a ferocious, catlike gliding motion along the deck, made the reporter shudder.

He saw an enormously tall and massive man with a curly beard of reddish yellow hair. Above small bloodshot eyes, which glistened with anger as he advanced toward Burns, the skipper had heavy eyebrows almost white in color. His face was beet-red where his weather-coarsened skin showed above his beard. His legs were too short for his long and massive torso, and he moved with an agility somehow awkward and inhuman in its disclosure of feline strength.

Shouting oaths and threats in English with a Scandinavian accent, he came toward them with long arms swinging. Sanderson noticed the thick, long hair on his forearms below the rolled-up sleeves of a silk shirt—an absurd, hideous silk shirt in green and pink stripes. He wore belted trousers of white duck, and he was in his stocking feet.

Sanderson just had time to wonder whimsically if Burns could swim when he felt a convulsive grip on his arm. He

turned to find the girl, the color fled from her cheeks, clutching his arm, while her eyes, wide open in fright, watched the oncoming of the enraged skipper.

The latter had seen her quick movement to Sanderson's side. Instantly he stopped and turned toward the reporter, his eyes blazing.

"Get out of here!" he shouted, and began a rush for Sanderson.

Pushing the girl behind him, Sanderson braced himself to meet the onslaught. He knew instinctively that the girl's friendliness, their coming aboard together, and now her convulsive clutching of his arm, had turned on him the wrath of this strange-looking seafarer who was bearing down on him with clenched fists.

Suddenly the girl, at his elbow, recovered her courage. She stepped in front of him and faced the grotesque figure now almost upon them. The huge man stopped and stared at her. His face softened slightly, but was still contorted with rage.

"They're strangers!" she cried. "They don't even know who you are. They just happened to come aboard at the same time I did. We didn't even use the same boat. I never saw them before!"

Firmly, but with an awkward gentleness, the skipper of the Panther made as if to brush past her in pursuance of his determination to hurl these intruders into the sea. Instead of yielding, the girl threw herself upon him, seizing his arms above the elbows and looking pleadingly up into his great hairy red face.

"Let them go, and I'll marry you tonight—this afternoon—as soon as we can get a license and find a minister!" she cried breathlessly. "I tell you they don't know me! They're not trying to interfere. It was my fault in running to this man. I had come on board to tell you!"

The island trader paused, his eyes shifty and suspicious. He looked from Sanderson to Burns and back again. Then he looked into the eyes of the girl clutching his arms. Slowly the ferocity died out of his own bloodshot eyes, and they softened to another kind of gleam—a gleam that instinctively stirred Sanderson to sudden angry protest.

"No, you don't!" he cried. "You'll not marry that brute to save us from a row! We can take care of ourselves. What's more, you'll not marry him at all, if I can help it. We'll teach your friend

here that such tactics don't go in an American port!"

Before the words were out of Sanderson's mouth the captain of the Panther had sent the girl spinning down the deck and had thrown himself on the reporter. Missing a right swing, Sanderson caught the flash of a blackjack, and for an instant everything blurred before him.

When his eyes cleared, he saw Captain Tollefson rushing at Burns. The frail and spectacled photographer was no match for a burly giant armed with a slug, and Sanderson sprang to his aid. The next instant he heard a cry from the girl, and his eyes were blinded by a vivid white flash.

As his vision cleared, he saw the captain staggering back with half his yellow beard burned away and his white eyebrows entirely gone. For an instant Tollefson gasped and panted in pain and rage; then a stream of oaths poured from his lips. He turned and raced toward the cabin.

Sanderson looked at Burns. The camera man stood calmly refilling the metal box of his flash-light instrument with more of the white powder with which he had repelled the skipper's attack.

"Come on, Burns—you've done quite enough," shouted Sanderson. "He'll get a gun in another minute. Over the side with you!"

He shoved the photographer to the rail, and saw him drop into the launch that lay waiting for them. The girl stood with one clenched hand raised to her chin in distress and indecision.

"You, too!" cried Sanderson. "Come on—quick!"

As she stood immobile, Sanderson grasped her with both arms and carried her to the side of the vessel. He held her over the rail, her feet on the rope ladder.

"Climb down!" he commanded, loosening his hold gradually as she took hold of the ladder.

He dropped in after her. The launch shot away from the schooner's side and headed for the wharf.

"That was a funny accident," chuckled Burns. "He needed a shave, anyhow!"

"Duck your head, you idiot!" shouted Sanderson.

They heard a muffled report to windward, and a bullet plopped into the water at the side of the launch. Crouching under the rail, they waited while the boat sped on out of range. Relaxed, then, and conscious

of a pleasant tingling of excitement, Sanderson looked at the girl.

He was appalled to see the mask of despair that was her face. She sat motionless, rigid, staring straight ahead of her. Sanderson's high spirits subsided, and in place of them a sudden pity welled up in him. Casting glances at the girl, wondering about her, he ceased to be the reporter and became the knight-errant before a maiden in distress.

At the wharf, Sanderson asked Burns to return to the office without him, and then turned to the girl. She stood shivering a little in the cold afternoon fog that had rolled in before they were aware of it, sweeping landward through the Golden Gate and over the long wooded slopes of the Presidio.

"I'll see you safely home," he said.

The set despondency of her face quickened to fresh alarm.

"Please don't!" she said. "You don't understand. It's bad enough now. He'll come ashore in a few minutes. Here he comes now!"

He turned, and saw a boat leaving the schooner. His face hardened.

"Where do you live?" he said.

"I can't tell you that. I can't tell you anything. Please go, and leave me alone!"

"I'm a newspaper man," said Sanderson. "You'd better let me help you. A big newspaper has a good deal of power, you know. You needn't be afraid of that ruffian."

Dumb pain showed in the girl's eyes. Sanderson imagined that she was struggling against a desire to confide in him.

"Can't you trust me?" he said.

His face was near hers, and his eyes were pleading. Unconsciously a vibrant quality of tenderness had crept into his voice. Responding to it, she suddenly looked up into his eyes, and again Sanderson felt a galvanic shock at the sudden revelation of their pure, clear loveliness.

"Won't you let me help you?" he pleaded again.

She was silent for a moment. Then a stiffening resolution swept her face clear of doubt and pain.

"You can't help me," she said. "I don't need any help. He's not a ruffian. I mustn't let you think that. I intend to marry him of my own free choice."

Sanderson stared at her in shocked amazement. As he watched, the brave

resolution that she had evoked faded again from her eyes, and again the mask of despair and reticence fell over them—fell between her and him.

"My God, girl!" cried Sanderson. "What are you thinking of? You can't marry a man like that! Won't you trust me? Won't you tell me about it? Who is that man out there?"

There was no answer. He saw a motion in her throat, and knew that she was choking down a sob.

"I'm going to find out," he said. "I'm used to finding out things, and I get what I go after!"

Fresh terror sprang into her eyes. Her hand went impulsively to his arm and rested there, pleading.

"Please don't!" she said. "If you want to help me, promise that you won't. And promise me that you won't put anything in the paper about us!"

With that ominous "us," which seemed to include her in some mysterious way with the man on the schooner, ringing in his ears, Sanderson hesitated.

"I won't to-day, anyhow," he said. "There's nothing to print, except that we got chased off a schooner while looking for a feature story about the South Seas. You'd better hurry, if you want to avoid meeting that man here on the wharf."

"I don't intend to avoid him," she said. "I might as well wait here. I've got to, sooner or later."

Sanderson's heart leaped as he saw her fear and loathing of the captain of the Panther struggle with resignation to whatever it was that bound these two together. An impulse mastered him. He suddenly found it impossible to abandon the girl to the ruffianly man who was now halfway ashore in the schooner's dinghy.

"I can't let you," he said. "You'll have to come with me!"

He flashed back the lapel of his coat, disclosing the reporter's silver fire badge, and as quickly concealing it again, before she had time to read its innocuous grant of authority. He grasped her firmly by the arm, and she walked by his side meekly enough as he set out for the end of the near-by car line, meanwhile keeping a lookout for a stray taxi. They came opposite a North Beach car about to start on its return to the center of town, and he handed her up to one of the lengthwise open seats, facing out.

The car had turned a corner, and was well on its way, when they caught a glimpse of Tollefson's dinghy as it rounded a corner of the wharf. Stealing a glance at the girl by his side, Sanderson thought she looked distinctly relieved.

"It'll do no harm to wait till he's cooled off," he reassured her. "And then perhaps you can see your way clear to waiting some more. You can't have any business with a man like that!"

She looked up at him, and now she made no effort to conceal her relief. A little smile played about her lips.

"Why should you bother?" she said. "You may be risking your life, you know. Captain Tollefson has a bad temper, and he's very much in earnest."

"I guess not!" said Sanderson. "It's not so serious as all that. Remember that you're in the United States of America."

Looking down at her again, he was stirred by the beauty of her trim figure, the spell of her charm, which already, in the course of an hour, had made him forget the troubles of a weary and disillusioned man of the world. He glowed at the thought that he was protecting her against some mysterious power that lay in the hands of the grim-looking seaman. His casual, flip-pant pose collapsed before his rekindled enthusiasm.

"Anyhow," he blurted, "I've taken risks a few times already to save the world for democracy. I'd much rather take risks for you. Couldn't say more than that, could I?"

She blushed very prettily and looked off over Chinatown, which lay below them on the hillside. Sanderson was blushing himself now. He suddenly remembered that here was a girl in real trouble, and no mere flapper meet for tender repartee.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

She opened her mouth as if to tell him, then bit her lip and remained silent.

"I want you to promise me," he said, "that you'll not go home now, and that you'll stay out of his reach for twenty-four hours. Just twenty-four hours—won't you promise? It's none too long for a decision like that. I'll introduce you to the manager of a quiet family hotel where no one will find you, and you can send a bell boy for whatever things you need. At the end of twenty-four hours I'll drop out of your life, I promise. It's your easiest way of getting rid of me, if that's what you want."

She hesitated.

"I'll do it," she said at last.

He left her at a hotel on Geary Street, after they had agreed that he might communicate with her under the name of Mary Jones.

At the office he faced a city editor far from pleased by the apparent failure of an assignment of his own planning.

"All right!" he said. "If you haven't got a story, you can't write one—that's a cinch. You remember what I told you!"

"It's worse than that," said Sanderson. "I want twenty-four hours of free time. By this time to-morrow I'll bring you either a real story or my resignation."

The city editor looked at him quizzically. He was impressed by something vibrant and intense in Sanderson's voice.

"All right!" he said gruffly.

III

SANDERSON left the newspaper office at five o'clock, after calling up Captain Nestlewood at his home in Sausalito, straight north across the bay, and getting a hearty invitation to dinner. Nestlewood had retired on a snug fortune after spending forty years as skipper and owner of a trading schooner in the South Seas. He had scorned regular trade routes, and had free-lanced about the Pacific from Sumatra to Alaska. Sanderson knew him as a storehouse of gossip and curious bits of information about almost everything in the Pacific, from the hairy Ainu of Japan to the pedigree and past of every white man in the islands.

Nestlewood Cottage, set back among live oaks from the road at the very top of the Sausalito hill, looked straight out over the villas clustered below it to the bay and the city beyond. From its trellised porch the old sailor, slightly crippled by rheumatism, could watch every craft that entered or left by the Golden Gate. His acquaintance with Sanderson had begun several years before, when the young man had done one of his best bits of feature-writing with Nestlewood as his subject.

On this July evening Sanderson, leaving the jitney that had brought him up the steep hill from the ferry, found his host seated on the porch. His bellowed greetings began as the reporter climbed the path from the road, and the old captain struggled from his chair to shake hands with his friend.

Sanderson sat down and took the stogy that his host handed him. He was already absorbed in contemplation of scores of sailing craft, skillfully carved in wood, and glued or nailed to the railings of the porch, the sills of the windows, and the edges of the flower boxes that flanked the stoop. Nestlewood, a stocky old man with a broad, genial face half hidden in his iron-gray beard, chuckled.

"Pretty clever, eh?" he said. "My old bosun on the Molly O. does 'em for me. He's bought himself a life berth in the Sailors' Home in the city, and spends his time carving these. You see that sampan? It's line for line the boat that carried twenty bloodthirsty Chinese river pirates right to my rail one hot night. That barkentine over there on the rail belonged to my best friend, Captain Bixer. She's laid up now in the Oakland estuary. She's laid up there and I'm laid up here, eh? Men and ships—it's all the same!"

His broad, genial face sobered suddenly. He leaned over toward Sanderson.

"I'm getting pretty deaf now," he said—pronouncing it "deef."

Captain Nestlewood sat back and cleared his throat violently. Sanderson, the sentimentalist that lurks in every good reporter aroused, felt the melancholy of the old man's mood.

"You can hear better than a lot of younger men I know," he shouted.

Captain Nestlewood snorted.

"That don't help any," he said. "It wouldn't be any comfort to me to sit around and talk with a lot of deaf men!"

Sanderson had an inspiration. Intending to ask only a question or two about a skipper named Tollefson, who owned a schooner called the Panther, he decided to throw his problem on the old man's shoulders and enlist his active help. It would please the captain to think that he was counted in on what Sanderson already regarded as an adventure. He leaned over, his face serious.

"I need your help," he shouted into the old man's ear. "I need your help to save a fine girl from marrying a horrible rotter, a regular brute. He's a skipper from the islands. There's his schooner out there in the stream now."

He pointed. The old man peered out over the bay, which began in cobalt blue sheer beneath them and stretched out in a sheet of sparkling water to the distant hills

of San Francisco, wreathed in wisps of fog. He reached for the telescope reposing in a rack at his side, and with it he looked long and intently.

"It don't tell me anything," he said. "There's a thousand schooners just like that. What's her name?"

"The Panther," said Sanderson.

The old man shook his head.

"Her owner's name is Tollefson," the reporter added, carefully watching the other's face.

This time he wasn't disappointed. A startled look came into blue eyes from which the dimness of age had fled—eyes suddenly alert and filling rapidly with some light of remembrance that gave the captain's face the stern look of a man facing danger.

"A big Norwegian?" he said. "Small eyes? Moves like a cat?"

"That's the man!" cried Sanderson. "I went aboard his ship this afternoon with a girl—a corking girl. No, I didn't know her. We just happened to go out at the same time. She's afraid of him. From what I gathered, he wants to marry her, and she thinks she has to. He started in to do us up because he came out of his cabin and saw us talking to her."

"Tollefson! Here in San Francisco Bay! What's the girl look like?"

Captain Nestlewood had wheeled abruptly about, moving his chair with a thump and facing Sanderson. His gnarled hands, clasping the arms of the rustic green chair, trembled, and the blood vessels on them stood out in great purple ridges.

"Tall, light-haired, straight nose, gray eyes, a thoroughbred."

Sanderson's recital of the girl's charms gathered enthusiasm as it proceeded, in his attempt to translate her vivid presence into cold words.

"Mary Petterson's daughter—little Frances! No, it can't be! Where is she now?"

Sanderson rapidly sketched the adventure of the afternoon.

"She's promised not to go home, wherever she lives, for twenty-four hours," he said. "The time's up at four o'clock tomorrow. It doesn't give us much of a chance."

He sat waiting, eager for whatever revelation the old man's agitation held for him. Instead of speaking, Captain Nestlewood struggled to his feet.

"Come on!" he said. "You go in and phone for a jitney. I'll be ready by the time it's here. I'll just speak to the China boy. We can eat on the ferryboat."

On the way down the hill, and after they were seated on the ferry to San Francisco, Sanderson suppressed the questions that came crowding to his lips. He trusted the old man implicitly, and had determined to go through with whatever Captain Nestlewood had in mind.

Swinging out against the tide almost to the Golden Gate, the ferry passed within one hundred yards of the Panther, which lay as if deserted. The captain peered eagerly at the schooner as they approached it, then shook his head.

"So he's got her here!" he muttered. "After all these years!"

He turned to Sanderson fiercely.

"Young man," he said, "you've brought me news that I spent ten years trying to get. If that girl is Mary Petterson's daughter, and that scoundrel is bullying her as he did her mother, I've got my job cut out for me!" He slapped his thigh in his excitement. "By Heavens!" he cried. "So that's what the Almighty has kept me for! And me cursing myself for a useless, worn-out old hulk!"

Again he turned suddenly to Sanderson, and grasped the reporter's arm.

"I'm an old man," he said earnestly. "Promise me that you'll see this thing through with me!"

Sanderson looked into the old captain's eyes. His own were solemn. He nodded slowly.

IV

SITTING with Captain Nestlewood in the lobby of the hotel that was the girl's domicile for a day, Sanderson rose eagerly as he saw her step out of the elevator.

As she glanced about and then came quickly toward them, he got the full impact of her beauty and of a new hauteur that had been lacking in the afternoon. Her hair had been tucked in with a net and smoothly drawn over her ears, so that she looked older, and, Sanderson thought, really beautiful, where she had been piquant and stunningly pretty. Her face was pale, and Sanderson guessed at once that she had been weeping.

As she gave him her hand she smiled—a smile that was touching in its intent to show self-mastery, and that was contra-

dicted by the distress lurking in her eyes. She began speaking quickly.

"I must ask you to forgive me for what happened this afternoon," she said. "I wasn't quite myself. Captain Tollefson is my best friend. I owe everything to him. I can't explain, but I want you to release me from the ridiculous promise I made you—about staying here, I mean."

Sanderson could only stare at her, aghast. He felt Captain Nestlewood nudging him violently, and turned and presented him. The captain stepped nearer to the girl, peering into her eyes, searching her face. She faced his scrutiny bravely. Sanderson, watching, saw that he was trembling with excitement.

"You have your mother's eyes," he said.

Sanderson saw that the old man hadn't heard what she said. He turned to the girl, whose eyes, full of wonder, were fixed on the captain's face.

"Let's get out of here," he suggested. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk. Captain Nestlewood has something to say to you. He's an old friend of your mother."

Frances Petterson turned, and Sanderson noticed that a bell boy stood near, holding her coat and a bag.

"I sent for these things just after you left me," she explained. "I'll take them with me, and perhaps you'll drop me at the ferry."

She followed them out of the hotel lobby, and they entered a cab at the curb, guided by Sanderson.

"Drive to the nearest park," he called.

Seating himself opposite the girl at Captain Nestlewood's side, Sanderson leaned over and shouted in his ear.

"She says Tollefson is her best friend," he said. "Says she owes everything to him. She's going back to him now."

For answer, the old man leaned forward and gripped the girl's arm in an iron clasp.

"You'll do no such thing!" he said.

Sanderson, watching, saw that she understood the honest, paternal, sterling quality of the old man, and didn't resent this new interference. Her eyes softened.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm a friend of your father and mother," he said. "I visited them every time I called anywhere in the Gilberts. I've gone seven hundred miles out of my way to drop in at their house when you were a baby."

"Then you know," she said, "that I owe everything to Captain Tollefson."

"Is that what he told you?" asked the captain.

"He took me to Honolulu," said the girl. "A missionary family looked after me until I was ten. Then he called for me, brought me here, and put me into a convent in Oakland—the best convent school on the Pacific Coast. He's given me everything. I'm attending the university at Berkeley now."

"How often have you seen him?" asked the captain.

"Once a year," she said. "He comes and deposits money for me until his next visit."

"And now he wants you to marry him?"

Sanderson saw her shoulders move in an involuntary shudder. Suddenly she buried her face in her hands.

"Yes," she said.

She drew her breath in two short sobs. Her hands, busy for an instant with a tiny orange handkerchief, left her face, and she looked up at the two men, dry-eyed again.

"He came to see me yesterday for the first time in more than a year. He brought me a beautiful ring. He asked me to walk with him up the cañon back of the campus in Berkeley. Then he stopped and looked at me in a new way, and tried to put this ring on my finger. I didn't know what he meant, at first; and when I did, I shuddered and drew back from him. Then he got down on his knees and told me he couldn't live without me. He threatened terrible things if I wouldn't marry him. He said it was all he had thought and dreamed of for sixteen years, ever since the day when he found me near the ruins of our house on the island. He said he counted on me to give him all the fine things he'd missed in life. He tried to kiss the hem of my skirt."

Again an involuntary shudder moved the girl's shoulders; but she mastered her voice and went on.

"Then he begged me just to give him my hand. He looked so grotesque that for an instant I wanted to laugh, but I was afraid. I couldn't let him touch me. I wanted to run; but afterward, when he had gone, I told myself that I was an ungrateful, selfish, wicked girl. I lay awake all night, thinking. Everything he had said was true. He asked me what would have become of me if he hadn't rescued me. He

said I'd be in the house of some native chief there. He pictured terrible things that might have happened to me. I thought how I had always had the very best of care and training, and that perhaps the very thing in me that made me shrink from him I owed to him. I hated myself. He told me that I looked like my mother. He said he had always worshiped her. He said that if he had met my mother before her marriage, his life would have been different. He said he had never loved any one else, and as he saw me growing up to be like her, he had lived with no other purpose than to make me his wife. He wanted to settle down here and forget everything that had been hard and unpleasant in his life. He said I could make an entirely different man of him, and could bring out all the good things in him that hadn't had a chance during his life in the islands. He showed me a picture of his mother. I lay awake all night, and I decided that I would go to him to-day, on board his schooner, as he had asked me to, and marry him at once. And then he came on deck, looking—"

She broke off, her alarm suddenly mastering her. They saw terror fill her eyes, which were like those of a frightened child.

"Mary Petterson!" muttered Captain Nestlewood hoarsely.

Sanderson, turning to look at the old man, saw that he was profoundly stirred. He reached over with his great gnarled paw and patted the girl's limp hand as it lay beside her on the cushion of the cab.

"Don't you be frightened," he said. "I'm not so sure you owe anything to that man. I'm thinking your debt is quite different; and if I'm right, it's Captain Nestlewood that will pay it with his own hands!"

"What do you mean?" she said. "Didn't it all happen as I've told you? But of course—"

"I got there just six weeks too late," Captain Nestlewood told her. "I only know that I found your father's home in ashes, the natives driven off into the mountains and scared out of their wits, and Tollefson's supercargo in charge."

"Then you know it's true!" she cried. "I was too young to remember. Captain Tollefson came the second day and drove the natives off. He had a small cannon on his schooner. He found me sitting under a tree in the courtyard."

Captain Nestlewood sat for a moment abstracted.

"It may be as you say," he said at length; "but Sanderson here is right—you mustn't marry him until we've had time to think about it."

"I've done nothing else for two days," said the girl. "I haven't had a wink of sleep. I've made up my mind!"

Captain Nestlewood opened the cab door and leaned out.

"Drive to the ferry!" he shouted. Then he closed the door, and, leaning over, patted the girl's hand. "You're coming over to my place in Sausalito," he said. "It's quiet and peaceful over there; and you'll be under the roof of a man who lost his best friends when your mother and father died. Then, if you still think you must marry Tollefson, I'll send for him tomorrow. What you need just now is a good night's sleep."

She leaned back on the cushions, and Sanderson saw her now as just a tired and bewildered child. He found himself enviously resenting the captain's prerogative as a graybeard and a friend of her parents, for the old man's gnarled fingers still held the limp and slender hand.

Passing through the gates with the crowd at the ferry building, Captain Nestlewood leaned over to Sanderson and whispered hoarsely into his ear.

"Here's your chance, my boy!" he said. "There's more than one way of blocking Tollefson's game. She's as fine a girl as you'll ever meet, and she comes of the right stock. You couldn't do better!"

A moment later the captain wondered why the young cub was so confoundedly touchy; but the next moment he shrewdly guessed that he had touched a nerve already sensitive.

On the big white ferryboat for Sausalito, Captain Nestlewood turned at the stairway leading to the upper deck and spoke to the young people.

"You two go on up," he said, "and leave the old captain down here for a pull at his pipe. I'll meet you as we run into the slip."

Sanderson smiled at the simplicity of the old skipper's guile.

On the upper deck they found seats where a corner of the cabin protected them from the cold night wind without shutting off a clear view of the shipping and the lights of the city. Something leaped in him

as he found that the girl shared his adoration of that nocturnal sky line of lamp-lit hills, with the streets marching boldly over them, carrying their lamps like banners up the steep slopes. The heights were crowned with yellow halos under the fog. Near at hand, at the base of the steepest hill of all, were the vague, slumbering forms of docks and ships, with red and green lights guarding them, casting oily, rippling gleams over the black water between them and the shore.

"Newspaper work must be fascinating," Frances said presently. "I'm sure I should love it!"

"It is, at first," said Sanderson. "It's all right for youngsters, until the spell wears off."

"But you aren't so terribly old!"

"Not in years, perhaps," admitted Sanderson; "but you see I've lived pretty fast and pretty hard. Fact is, I'm tired of everything. I feel as if I'd done everything there was to do and seen everything worth seeing. What with years of newspapering, and the war, and all, things have got awfully flat and stale!"

He was looking across the stretch of bay to the marching lights of the city, and within him was a strange exhilaration that belied his words. It was a marvelous experience just to confess his plight to this understanding girl at his side. He didn't know that she, stealing a sidewise glance, was smiling with a wisdom inborn for fathoming the hearts of men—even cynical, world-weary men like Sanderson.

He was driven by a sudden impulse to reveal himself utterly to this girl who understood. His mind teemed with confidences that crowded one another for speech.

"Fact is," he went on, "I've been awfully lonely. The old gang was all scattered when I got back from France. Nothing was the same. The best friend I had in the world got married; and the girls I knew didn't help any. All they care about is parties and dancing and clothes and automobiles. They're a light-headed lot—don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," she said, but her answer had only a remote relation to whatever she might have thought of the girls of the day.

As Sanderson glanced down, their eyes met, and he saw that hers were soft with understanding and sympathy. A rush of warm, generous admiration swept him.

"If there were more girls like you, now," he said, "men wouldn't go to the dogs the way they do. You've been *through* something! You've suffered! You can understand! If I had a girl like you to pal around with, I'd be a different man."

"Please don't!" she protested.

He looked down at her, and saw that her eyes were filled with trouble as she stared out over the water. Suddenly he remembered Captain Tollefson. He found himself clenching his fists.

"Forgive me!" he said.

His hand found hers on the seat between them. He gave it a long, firm clasp—a clasp meant to be fatherly and platonic and understanding.

She didn't try to withdraw her hand. Not even the imminence of her trouble could rob her of surrender to this moment of discovery and renunciation—a discovery all the sweeter, a renunciation all the more poignant, because there was loathing and tragedy for her in the sinister figure of the island trader standing between her and any fulfillment of a girl's dreams.

They sat silent for a long time, acutely, exquisitely conscious of each other, while overhead the wind made a steady singing sound among the stanchions and cordage of the boat, and white sea gulls, following, came and went out of the darkness lying over the waters of the bay.

V

WHEN Frances Petterson had gone upstairs after gracious "good nights" that had left them fatuously under the spell of her charm, Captain Nestlewood turned to Sanderson.

"The China boy will see that she's comfortable up there in the guest room," he said. "Suppose we take a turn on the road below? This thing will take some planning."

On their way down the hill the old man at last relaxed and spoke freely.

"Her father was one of the finest men in the islands," he said. "On one of his visits to San Francisco he met the daughter of the Norwegian consul, and married her. She was like this girl—a fine woman. We all envied him. Petterson had made his fortune by using his head and treating the natives decently. They'd bring him stuff by the canoe-load, at his home there on Richardson's Island, when another man would have had to haggle and bargain for

weeks. His trade was mostly with Australia, and the last time I saw him he was sailing for Sydney with a final cargo. He had a fine little barkentine, named after his wife. He intended to draw out all his money from two Sydney banks in gold, bring it back with him, and then pack up and move to San Francisco. For some reason the bank arrangements about exchange didn't please him, and he thought it would be safer and cheaper. Nothing could ever happen to him and that barkentine! Well, nothing ever did, with Petterson aboard of her. He intended to retire and build a home here. The girl was four years old then, and it was too lonely for her and the mother on that island. They were the only whites there.

"Now about the trouble on the island—all that I could ever find out was what a surly Frenchman that Tollefson had left in charge would tell me. He said the natives had got drunk, and one of Petterson's men had lost his head and shot a son of the chief, who was becoming obstreperous. He said the others ran amuck, burned down the Petterson house, and killed Petterson and his wife. Then, he said, Tollefson's schooner arrived and scared them off, and Tollefson came ashore and found this child. He declared there wasn't a sign of Petterson's money. As for the barkentine, he showed me the tip of her mainmast, above water a few feet at low tide, out near the point. The natives, in their drunken rage, had got aboard in their canoes and scuttled her, he told me."

Captain Nestlewood's face darkened as he spoke of the grim and mysterious tragedy that had left Frances Petterson an orphan.

"At Honolulu I found that Tollefson had brought his schooner into port with this child aboard, and with the same tale that I'd heard from the Frenchman. From the first I doubted his story. At the very least I suspected that Tollefson had found something worth keeping still about in the ruins of the house; but I had nothing to go on, except what I knew of Tollefson and what I knew of Petterson. I hunted up the Norwegian consul here on my next visit, but there had been a change, and they told me Mrs. Petterson's father had resigned and taken to ranching down in the San Joaquin Valley. I wrote him a letter, but I never got a reply.

"I did find a clerk in the consulate who

knew all about Tollefson. There had been a circular issued about him. He'd been in trouble years before with a girl back home, in Norway. Then, a year or two before this, he'd turned his three-pounder on a native village without any provocation, except that they objected to his getting drunk and trying to make off with one of the native girls. He told the French government—it was down in the Society group—that it was self-defense, and he appealed to a Norwegian consulate somewhere down there to get him out of the scrape. They did, but they had their fingers crossed after that, and they sent out this circular to warn all their agents.

"I was morally certain that the natives hadn't murdered Frances's father and mother, for they almost worshiped those two people. Moreover, there was the gold. There must have been at least a hundred thousand dollars in English sovereigns; but nobody ever heard of it again. Tollefson lived on his schooner—not this one. An American consul who investigated at my request couldn't find any trace of a bank account or a safe-deposit vault, except Tollefson's regular accounts, which were perfectly legitimate. He had no home ashore at all. At least, he claimed not to have; but sometimes he would disappear for months at a time, and come back to the trade routes tight-lipped and with nothing to show for it. You know, there are enough obscure islands scattered about the Pacific to lose a regiment in. I didn't worry about the girl until he took her away from Honolulu. He never mentioned her again, and that didn't look right; but all I could do was to try again to locate her grandfather, the ex-consul here. I did, in a cemetery in a little town down in the valley, where he'd been ranching. He had married again—Frances's grandmother had died early—and his widow and her three children weren't interested. They needed all the money he had left them, and I don't suppose they relished the thought of a strange cousin appearing in their midst. They were nice about it, but indifferent. And what could they do? I couldn't do anything myself. Then you come bursting in on me with your story of Tollefson and a beautiful light-haired girl. Her father was one of the handsomest men I ever saw. He was something of a scholar, too, besides being a shrewd, successful trader and an island diplomat."

Sanderson's darting professional mind turned up its first "hunch."

"What sort of a crew did Tollefson have at that time?" he asked.

"Native, of course. There was this French supercargo—yes, and one other white man, a little cockney. At least the cockney was aboard her when I met up with them three months later, at Samoa. I never knew his name."

"Can't we cable?" asked Sanderson. "Don't they register the crews at some of these ports?"

"It's a slim chance," said the captain; "but it's worth trying. I'll cable the shipping commissioner at Honolulu."

At the railroad ticket office in the ferry building at the foot of the hill they found an agent authorized to receive messages, and Sanderson fidgeted while Captain Nestlewood painfully scrawled a cable to Honolulu. By the time he had handed it in and paid for it, Sanderson was ready with another suggestion.

"Suppose we hire a launch and go out around the schooner?" he said. He glanced at his watch. "It's ten o'clock. He'll probably be aboard her."

"Are you armed?" asked the captain.

For answer, Sanderson opened his coat and showed the black butt of an army automatic strapped to his waist, outside his vest.

Captain Nestlewood found an Italian launch owner at his home over a little restaurant on the one street of shops that circled the base of the hill. A few minutes later the launch with its three occupants sped away from the shore toward the Panther, lying out in the darkness three-fourths of the way to the San Francisco side.

Sitting aft, a boat length away from the Italian, Captain Nestlewood relaxed and lit his pipe.

"Tollefson is a remarkable and a dangerous man," he said. "He's not just the brute you thought him. There are stories about him in every port in the islands. They say that he once had a commission in the Norwegian army, and that his people were somebody over there. One reason we all hated him was his queer power over women—certain women, a good many of them, and not all the kind you would think. This girl's mother couldn't stand him; but that only whetted his desire. He would run his schooner into Petterson's there—it was practically Petterson's island

—and go ashore, with a native coming along behind him carrying gifts—rare textiles and gold ornaments that he'd picked up in trading with the natives, or from some Chinaman. His manner was offensive. He made no attempt to conceal his admiration for Mary Petterson, and yet he never gave her husband a chance to assert his resentment. He kept just this side of the line. Whenever he did say anything insinuating he'd pretend it was a joke, and reach over and pound Petterson on the back. Petterson and I were talking about the fellow one night when we sat late on the porch of his house, smoking. He was helpless, because Tollefson would have made the most of any fracas, and would have bragged about it all over the islands, with an implication damaging to Mary Petterson and intolerable for her husband. And now he's all but got their daughter! But he won't, not if I end up over there at San Quentin for stopping him!"

"But couldn't you trace her father's money?" asked Sanderson. "Those natives couldn't have swallowed twenty thousand British sovereigns."

"We tried. You must remember that the affair was a first-rate sensation in the islands sixteen years ago. There were a lot of amateur detectives working on it, and the whole Pacific was talking about it. Tollefson took over the trading at Richardson's Island, and left one of his agents there. He kept the natives terrified when they weren't drunk with his rotten gin, and apparently one of the things they had had drilled into them was that they weren't to gossip with strangers. I don't think they knew anything, at that. You see, their silence when the Pettersons were mentioned fitted in with his story that they had done the killing. Tollefson made a report to the authorities to the effect that he had taken the law into his own hands, and had shot the ringleaders. That's legitimate South Sea practice where the lives of whites are involved, and when a French gunboat called, and the commanding officer found everything quiet, with Tollefson's man in charge, he sailed off satisfied.

"What would wake me up in a cold sweat in those days was a suspicion almost too terrible to think about. You know there are plenty of islands out there where there aren't any white men, and the native chiefs carry things with a high hand. Because of his size and his ruthlessness and

the devilish something in him that made him impressive even among whites, Tollefson had an extraordinary power over savages. There was a vague story floating around the island ports of a place where he was chief, and lived with a household of natives, taking part in all their wild customs. The story was tied up with the talk about his mysterious absences from the trade routes. I used to wake up at night thinking of the possibility of Mary Pettersen being a prisoner on that island. I itched to have my fingers on Tollefson's throat, but it was perfectly futile—I couldn't do a thing."

Sanderson shuddered. The launch had run out of the starlight into the bank of white fog that enters San Francisco Bay almost nightly through the Golden Gate and lies like an arrow pointing to the Berkeley Hills. They ran on in silence, the launchman steering for Meiggs's Wharf on instructions from the captain.

They went on for a long time before Sanderson's keen ears caught the creaking of a boom off to the right. He hurried forward. The launchman brought his craft around, and a moment later shut off the engine. Their headway carried them under the port bow of the schooner, where the launchman seized her cable and held the launch with its stern nuzzling the side of the larger craft.

The Panther's red and green lights were burning, but there was no sound aboard her except the soft creaking of the tackle as she swayed gently in the tide. Sanderson whispered hoarsely into Captain Nestlewood's ear.

"I'll just shin over the side and have a look around," he said. "You'd better stay here."

The captain rose and tried to reach the schooner's rail, but he was too short, and there was no spring left in his rheumatic legs. He watched Sanderson anxiously as the latter sprang from the stern of the launch and grasped the rail with both hands.

A moment later the reporter had dropped down on deck and found himself facing a stolid Chinese seaman, one hand to his belt.

"Where is Captain Tollefson?" Sanderson inquired brusquely.

"Captain not here," said the Chinaman. "More better you come morning. More better you go away quick!"

For answer, Sanderson brushed his coat aside and rested his hand on the butt of the army automatic. His left hand clasped the Chinaman's shoulder and firmly propelled him aft.

Darting sullen, angry glances back at his captor, the Chinaman proceeded, with occasional firm pushes from Sanderson, toward the cabin. The reporter's right hand held the pistol ready, and as the Chinaman turned at the cabin companionway he poked it into the fellow's ribs. The seaman turned then, and obeyed Sanderson's gestured command.

Inside the cabin, lit by a kerosene ship's lantern, Sanderson instantly felt the same uneasiness and instinctive bristling that the sight of Captain Tollefson had aroused in him that afternoon. His senses were keyed to an alertness he had not known since that final morning when his battalion went "over the top" on the road to Sedan.

Yet he faced no apparent danger. The cabin was empty. The cowed Chinaman kept his distance, his eyes on the blue steel automatic in Sanderson's hand.

The cabin reminded Sanderson of the dressing room of a vaudeville performer, or of a prize fighter with his roots in the underworld. There were photographs of flashy-looking women, bearing the names of photographers of Honolulu, Sydney, Shanghai, and Valparaiso. Some were in scanty bathing suits, others in tights and the frilled ballet skirts of the theater. There was a gaudy menu card from a restaurant in Manila, scrawled with the names of men and women.

There were several photographs of Tollefson himself—one as a boxer, showing his magnificent torso to the best advantage; another of a young man in a stiff braided uniform, his face undeniably handsome, but arrogant and sensual. No wonder that he had covered that unpleasant mouth with a beard!

There were photographs of two schooners, the *Encore* and the *Panther*. Around the wall ran a window seat upholstered in blue and yellow plush, the yellow soiled and stained as if by much spilling of wine. A festoon of champagne corks hung in one corner. The room smelled of stale liquor, of cigar smoke, and of some heavy, sweet perfume.

Sanderson made note of every object with the lightning rapidity and intensity of his brimming excitement. His mind was

working with the flashing speed of the trained reporter; but not even his biggest story had gripped him as had his determination to save this girl of the golden hair from marriage with a man who, in that relation, would be worse than a murderer.

Under a ship's chronometer, built into the cabin, with a flat space on top used by Tollefson as a dressing table, was a chest of drawers. Sanderson moved over to it, after backing the Chinaman into a corner with another thrust of the gun, and pulled out one drawer after another. He found a large number of neckties and gayly striped shirts. Underneath were drawers filled with underwear, duck trousers, and socks.

Rummaging among these in the bottom drawer, he came upon a packet of papers. He glanced quickly through them, noting the dates of the postmarks in French, English, and Spanish. They were all recent. None was from San Francisco, and most of them bore the return cards of trading firms and ships' chandlers.

Sanderson was about to lay them back in their corner when, underneath them, he saw a little pile of small handkerchiefs. He picked these up, and caught a lingering fragrance of lavender. He was struck by their daintiness and the sheer quality of the linen. On the impulse of the moment he stuffed them into his coat pocket.

Wheeling, he surveyed the room for other receptacles. There was nothing else that invited inquiry. He tried the door of the trade room forward. It was locked. He debated an instant, then decided that a search there would be futile.

Gesturing a command to the Chinaman, he followed him up the stairway and forward to the rail. There he searched the man for firearms before going over the side into the waiting launch.

Depressed and baffled, Sanderson and the captain sat in silence during the return to Sausalito and the ride up the hill in a late jitney which they had found waiting at the ferry. Entering the house, they saw a light burning in the girl's room, and heard her moving about on the upper floor.

Captain Nestlewood dropped heavily into a seat. Sanderson sat down opposite him and stared dejectedly at his feet spread out in front of him.

Suddenly he remembered the handkerchiefs, and pulled them listlessly from his pocket. There were four, each of the finest

linen and daintily embroidered. He walked over and dropped them carelessly in the captain's lap.

"I found these in a drawer in Tollefson's cabin," he said.

Captain Nestlewood picked them up gingerly and regarded them with disapproval. He fingered the corners. Suddenly he sat bolt upright in his chair and held one of them close to his eyes. Sanderson looked, and saw the initials "M. E. P." embroidered in the corner. He also saw that the old man's hands trembled as they held the tiny bit of linen, and that his face worked with strong feeling.

"There wasn't a stick of their house left," he said; "and not so much as a twisted pin in the ruins!"

"You don't mean—" began Sanderson.

"I mean nothing," snapped the captain; "but I intend to find out! And if what I fear happened, I'll—"

Sanderson, appalled, watched the old sailor as he broke off and with his big hands made the motion of clutching a throat. He rose now and paced the floor in his agitation.

"The natives might have taken a lot of stuff and turned it in later in trading," suggested the reporter.

"I hope so," said the captain.

The old man's excitement, the horror of his suspicions, communicated themselves to Sanderson. He felt suddenly a terrible depression. It was succeeded by a wave of pity for the girl up there over their heads, a new determination to save her at any cost from marriage with the master of the Panther.

VI

RISE early from his improvised bed on a couch in a screened-in porch at the side of the house, Sanderson entered the living room and found Captain Nestlewood already pacing up and down, undeterred by twinges of pain from his knee which at intervals contracted the muscles of his face. As he greeted his host the front door opened and Frances Petterson entered, her arms full of roses and marigolds from the garden.

Sanderson sprang forward to relieve the girl of her burden. Captain Nestlewood's broad face beamed and his eyes twinkled as he regarded his guests.

"By George!" he cried. "You two youngsters improve the looks of this place!

When we get rid of this scoundrel on the schooner, you've got to come over, both of you, and spend a week end with the old man. And take my advice—don't grow old yourselves without having some youngsters of your own around!"

Sanderson laughed and glanced at the girl. Her face had sobered, and the drawn, frightened look of the night before had come back into her eyes.

"I must tell you," she said. "I lay awake thinking for a long time last night, and it's all clear to me now. Blame me for being a weak and hysterical girl, but don't blame Captain Tollefson. It was simply that you caught me when I wasn't myself. Naturally the thought of marrying any one was a shock at first; but everything he said to me was true. I've been selfish and ungrateful. I've known him all my life, ever since I can remember, and I've known only kindness from him. I owe everything to him; and if I can repay him now by becoming his wife and making a home for him, I should be happy to do it."

"My dear girl—" began the captain in a pleading voice, taking both her hands.

"Please don't try to persuade me," she interrupted, drawing back from him. "I'm my own mistress. I must choose for myself, and I have chosen. We were all terribly unfair to Captain Tollefson last night!"

Captain Nestlewood stood silent before the ring of decision in her voice and the sudden poise and maturity of her manner.

"At least," he temporized, "you'll stop and have breakfast with us?"

The girl looked toward the dining room, where a Chinese in white could be seen disposing food on the table. With a return of her girlish graciousness she smiled and nodded, and they moved into the other room.

Sanderson's heart was heavy as he tried in vain to think of something to say. He was desperately wondering whether Tollefson could have some hold on the heart of this girl, whose mother had repulsed the Norwegian skipper years ago. After all, she was little more than a child. Could it be that something romantic, something innately maternal, had been touched by the appeal of this great hulking boulder, this mysterious veteran of squalid dissipations in remote islands?

Sanderson thought of some of the banalities he had seen on the screen—fine

women wooed and won by men of Tollefson's type who suddenly developed unsuspected nobility. That was it! The big brute had no doubt taken exactly the conventional line—admission that he had led an evil life, an appeal to her to arouse the good in him.

Sanderson, sitting at table with this delicate thoroughbred of a girl at his elbow, felt suddenly nauseated by a vision of her in that cabin on the Panther, with its wine-stained cushions, its mementos of sordid orgies—worst of all, its master in his hideous pink and green shirt.

The doorbell rang, and Sanderson, with the captain's nodded permission, jumped to answer it. A small boy stood outside with a cablegram. The reporter thrust a coin into his hand and rushed back to the dining room, where he handed the envelope to Captain Nestlewood and then stood over him, manners temporarily forgotten in his burning curiosity.

The captain opened the envelope, and they read:

Tollefson, owner schooner *Encore*, shipped June, 1902, one Thomas Masters, age thirty-four, birthplace London. Masters signed with his mark, which was drawing of hand with two fingers missing. Masters remembered here as Three-Fingered Tom.

JONES, Deputy Commissioner.

The captain stared down at the message in silence, shaking his head. Then he stuffed it into his pocket, and, returning his attention to the table, offered Miss Pettersen the cream for her figs. They finished the meal in silence.

When the girl had left them to go upstairs and put on her hat, Sanderson turned quickly to the captain.

"I'll go with her," he said. "I don't care what she says. I'll stay by her side and see the thing through. Perhaps I can scare Tollefson off just by talking to him."

Captain Nestlewood shook his head.

"Not him!" he said. "Force is the only thing that will stop him; and we can't wait for the law. But go ahead, my son. I've got a job over here. There's a revenue cutter lying just off shore near Spreckles Cove, and her master is an old friend of mine. It'll be queer if I can't give him some story that will justify him in watching the Panther and keeping her in port for a day or two."

As the two shook hands solemnly, Sanderson heard a rustle of skirts at the turn

of the stairs. He picked up his hat. Frances saw him.

"Please don't trouble yourself," she said.

"I'm crossing anyhow," he told her. "If you don't mind, I'll just walk down the hill with you. You'll surely let me see you home?"

"I shall have to confess, then," she said. "I worked it out for myself while you were gone last night. I telephoned a message to the telegraph office for Captain Tollefson, telling him I'd meet him at Meiggs's Wharf at eleven o'clock this morning."

"I'm sorry," said Sanderson, "but I intend to be there, too. Please don't be angry!"

Watching her face intently, he saw tears spring to her eyes. She turned and gave her hand to Captain Nestlewood without a word. Sanderson felt himself a low meddler as he followed her out of the house and walked by her side down the steep hill to the ferry.

He left her on the upper deck of the ferryboat and went below to mingle with the commuters from the Marin suburbs. Business men and clerks stood in knots on the deck, paced up and down, or filled the benches amid a blue haze of smoke. Sanderson greeted an acquaintance, and marveled at the usualness of this life about him.

One question preyed on him—did Frances Petterson feel a spark of anything that could be called love for the master of the Panther? With no certainty as to her real feeling, he might be playing the part of a meddling and girl-struck idiot. It required all his resolution to keep level before him his determination to see it through.

As the ferry drifted into her slip at the foot of Market Street, he rejoined her on the upper deck, and she permitted him to carry her bag as they walked off the apron and through the passage under the ferry building. They emerged on the broad cement walk beyond. Commuters in a stream were hurrying for street cars, and travelers were besieged by runners and cabmen at the curb. Newsboys filled the air with their shouts, and hurrying pedestrians jostled them on either side.

Turning to buy a newspaper, Sanderson received a violent push and stumbled forward almost on his face. Recovering himself, he wheeled in time to see Captain Tollefson and a man in chauffeur's uniform

hustle Frances Petterson into a waiting cab. Tollefson jumped in after her. The driver leaped to his seat and started his engine, and the cab darted off, leaving Sanderson impotent in the stream of commuters that flowed past him on either side.

He stood there trying to recapture the fleeting glimpse he had had of her face. His heart beat exultingly as he told himself that her eyes had suddenly filled with the same aversion and shrinking that he had seen in them the day before in the presence of that man.

Only then did he find room for any emotion of alarm at her sudden abduction. He debated, then turned to the near-by public telephone and called up Captain Nestlewood's cottage in Sausalito. He was relieved to hear the captain's voice, uttering indignant expletives over a jitney that had kept him waiting for thirty minutes on his venture to the revenue cutter.

"She's with Tollefson," said Sanderson. "He was waiting with a cab and bundled her into it. Yes, he caught me napping. He'd received her telegram, and I suppose he decided to take no chances. When he saw me carrying her bag, he suspected she was double-crossing him. We've got to stop that schooner!"

"Here's my jitney honking now," replied the captain. "I'll go aboard the cutter and then take the first boat to town. Meet me if you can. If not, I'll leave word at the Matson Line offices and keep in touch with them until I hear from you."

Sanderson walked out to the curb and stood facing the broad Embarcadero, his mind racing. He hailed a cab and drove to Meiggs's Wharf. He found the Panther's dinghy tied snugly out of the way. The engineer of the quarantine tug lying at the wharf told him he had seen a tall man with a red beard come ashore in the ship's boat early that morning.

Sanderson found a telephone in the customs office and got the registrar's office at the university in Berkeley. After a long wait the operator gave him the name of a Greek letter sorority as the address of Miss Frances Petterson.

He called up the house, and was told that Miss Petterson hadn't been at home since the day before. In the afternoon of the preceding day she had telephoned that she was staying with friends. There had been several calls for her from a Captain Tollerton.

Sanderson decided to remain where he was until he could expect Captain Nestlewood's arrival on this side of the bay. It was a clear morning, with a north wind blowing, and looking north over the bay he could see Mount Tamalpais and the curves of the Sausalito hill in cameo clearness. A thousand yards or so out in the stream lay the Panther.

Sanderson went into the customs shed and introduced himself to a clerk as a reporter, flashing his badge. He emerged in a moment with a pair of binoculars. He fastened these on the schooner, and was not surprised to see two or three men at work on the sails.

He searched the Sausalito shore beyond, and finally made out the lead-colored hull of a revenue cutter lying under the hill. Watching, he saw a boat move away from her side. For a long time he couldn't tell which way it was moving, or whether it moved at all. Then he saw that it was coming closer, moving toward him, beginning the four-mile journey from the Sausalito shore to—the Panther! Captain Nestlewood had done it!

VII

SANDERSON watched until the motor-driven launch from the cutter had disappeared behind the schooner, and he had seen a figure in dark uniform mount the Panther's deck on the farther side. Then he jumped into the cab which he had kept waiting, and drove back to the ferry building. He saw a Sausalito boat approaching the slip, and a few moments later greeted Captain Nestlewood as he emerged in the van of the hurrying commuters.

The old sailor was puffing and grim.

"I told them she was smuggling pearls," he said. "He'll not leave port in a hurry!"

Sanderson's brief elation had worn off. He was profoundly depressed now.

"We shall only make matters worse unless we can prove something," he said. "She's not a girl to be badgered into changing her mind in an affair of this kind. She already thinks we're unfair to that scoundrel."

The old captain caught his mood.

"There's just a chance my old bosun would remember something," he said. "Suppose we go over to the Sailors' Home and call him in on this? No, no—we'll walk. It's only half a mile, and we can think better."

They struck off across the Embarcadero and south of Market past a disreputable frontage of squalid saloons, pool halls, and restaurants. The sidewalk facing the docks was crowded with idling seamen, for the most part Scandinavians belonging to the innumerable steam lumber schooners of the port, with a sprinkling of every seafaring race under the sun. Among them moved habitués of San Francisco's underworld—peddlers of bootleg whisky and smuggled drugs, cappers for cheap gambling houses and music halls, beggars, all the refuse of a great ocean and a great continent swept in here where land and water met.

They turned off the Embarcadero into a side street flanked by dilapidated, jerry-built frame lodging houses, their upper floors ornamented by the bizarre and hideous scrollwork of an earlier day. Sanderson knew the district as one that had escaped the great fire following the earthquake of 1906. He had prowled around down here many a time in his impressionable cub days, feeding his imagination on these relics of a bygone day when the bay was a forest of masts, and the crimp and the shanghaiier plied their trade along the water front practically immune from police interference.

With its mean houses, its dark, evil-smelling, gas-lit saloons, and the furtive derelicts who peopled it, this shabby district had never lost its appeal to him. Walking through it now with Captain Nestlewood, his eyes took in every detail of stained and rotting doorways, with glimpses through into dark bars that had echoed to the drunken laughter of men from every corner of the earth.

Suddenly Sanderson stopped dead and stood staring at a cracked window, opaque with dirt. On the pane, in dirty white paint, was a crude drawing of a human hand with the third and little fingers missing at the stump.

Sanderson pointed to the sign below the painted hand. In plain letters it read:

THREE-FINGERED TOM'S

Peering in, they saw a deserted bar backed by a mirror draped in pink cheesecloth. Opposite the brass rail, on the other side of the room, the space was filled by three card tables and a number of chairs. In the window, between the tables and a tattered curtain stretched on a rod breast

high, a small and decrepit-looking monkey, wearing a silver collar, scratched among dead flies and moths.

The room beyond ran back into shadows. Sanderson, peering, gradually made out a flimsy wooden partition halfway to the ceiling, with a door in the center.

"Come on!" he cried.

They entered the low, dingy room and walked up to the bar. Presently they heard a stir behind the partition, and the door in the center opened to admit a black-haired, undersized man wearing a shirt, a pair of stained overalls, and no collar. His mouth was concealed by a black mustache. His face was square, the skin pasty and white in contrast with the blackness of his hair. His eyes were sharp and truculent.

He moved behind the bar, and, wiping his hands on a towel hanging there, faced them.

"What 'll it be, gents?"

"Ginger ale for two," said Sanderson.

He watched as the black-haired man fumbled among the bottles, and saw that two fingers were missing from his right hand.

"Didn't you use to be out in the islands?" asked Sanderson.

The man wheeled instantly and fixed the reporter with suspicious, hard eyes.

"What about it?" he said.

"Nothing," replied Sanderson lightly; "only I'm a newspaper man, and I've heard that you could give us the story of the Petterson murder."

The dark little man's mangled hand flew to his hip, and his lips drew back in an ugly snarl. Before he could move again, Sanderson leaned over the bar with the muzzle of his army automatic pointing at the man's stomach.

"Drop your hand!" he said. There came an ominous click from the automatic, and the man's hand dropped at his side. "Lay them on the bar, now, both of them!" commanded Sanderson. "Now put them in the air. That's better! Show us what you've got here. Take us into your back room."

Three-Fingered Tom's manner changed. He smiled and fawned.

"I can't do it, mister," he said. "There's a lady back there. You wouldn't bother a lady? If it's money you're after, I'll give you what's in the till."

"It's the lady we're after," said Sanderson. "Where's Tollefson gone?"

"He'll be back any moment," said the cockney; "and it won't be 'ealthy for any of us if he finds you 'ere!"

Sanderson jerked his gun toward the door in the partition. Captain Nestlewood was already opening it.

"March along with your hands up!" cried Sanderson. "Step lively — back through that door!"

He followed Tom closely with the gun until they were through the door. Then, pushing the gun sharply against the man's side, he raised his eyes for the first time, and saw Captain Nestlewood kneeling over a figure on the soiled and sagging couch at one side of the dim room.

Peering, he saw that it was Frances Petterson, bound hand and feet, and with a gag in her mouth. The captain was removing this last, and a moment later the girl sat up, gasping.

Nestlewood turned toward the cockney, his face livid, his great fist clenched. Cowering before Sanderson's pistol, Tom's nerve gave way. Standing with his hands high above his head, he pleaded for mercy.

"You and Tollefson will swing before this is over!" cried the captain.

At that instant Sanderson spun around at a noise from the saloon, in time to cover Tollefson as he stood in the doorway. The man loomed immense in a black broadcloth frock coat, with a flower in his buttonhole.

"Throw up your hands!" cried Sanderson sharply.

For answer Tollefson charged at him, head down. One great hand struck the reporter's wrist as the pistol exploded, but Sanderson had managed to spring aside, and the big Norwegian, plunging, fell headlong. He was up like a cat.

Sanderson stood with the gun covering both Tollefson and the cockney as they stood staring fatuously at the muzzle of the automatic. Captain Nestlewood, his own gun ready, stood between the two men and the girl, who had jumped to her feet. No one spoke for a long time.

Suddenly Tollefson's tension relaxed. He stripped off his coat, and they saw a widening crimson stain on his shoulder. He dropped into a kitchen chair beside the plain wooden table which was the only other article of furniture in the room besides the couch where the girl had been laid.

Bringing out a large handkerchief with a bright purple border, and holding it in

his left hand, he began to stanch the flow of blood from his wounded shoulder. His face broke into an engaging smile.

"You men will be the death of me yet," he said. "I don't understand it. I can't see where you hold either cards or chips in this game. I've known Miss Petterson since she was a baby, and until you came along our plans were going smoothly. I had to use force this morning because there was no other way to make sure you wouldn't bedevil her again. When I got her telegram this morning, I hoped that she had come to her senses; but when I saw this young man at her side I lost my temper and acted hastily."

He turned to the girl ingratiatingly, almost tenderly.

"I hope you'll understand that and forgive me," he said.

He turned to Captain Nestlewood and searched his face.

"You remember me, I see!" said the old skipper. "I arrived at Richardson's Island just six weeks too late!"

"What do you mean?" said Tollefson.

"I mean that her parents would probably be alive to-day if I had got there before you did."

"You're going to drag up that old mud and throw it at me, are you?" said the other. "Don't you know that the French government made an investigation and disposed of all those lies?"

His gracious, amiable pose collapsed before his anger. Sanderson, watching, saw the glistening ferocity flare up into his eyes, as the reporter had seen it before on board the Panther.

"By Heavens!" cried Tollefson. "I'll not be slandered and insulted and attacked by you two without making you pay for it! If the laws of this country won't reach you, I'll use my own law, my own two hands! If you think you can get away with this because I'm a friendless island skipper, you're damned well mistaken!"

He broke off, and again his manner changed suddenly as he turned to the girl. He rose to his feet and moved nearer to her, until they stood facing each other.

Sanderson, watching him, paid grudging tribute to the man's superb physique, and noted in amazement the undeniably handsome and rakish tilt of his head as he stood smiling down at her, his eyes appealing. He had had his beard and mustache clipped closely to conceal the effects of Burns's

flash light, and he might have been taken now for a gallant man of the world.

His arms were folded on his great breast, his left hand holding the handkerchief against the wound in his right shoulder. His voice had a somber, tragic note as he addressed the girl.

"Frances," he said, "I'm still willing to leave it all to you. You saw this morning the sort of thing I'm capable of when my passion is aroused. I've already told you that I'm not fit for you; but for God's sake be merciful, and remember my provocation! For year after year I've thought of you every hour of the day and dreamed of you at night. I've lived only for the time when I could come and ask you to be my wife. I've walked the deck under the stars more nights than you know, planning and dreaming of the home that you and I would some day have here on the hill over the bay. I told myself that you would believe in me and my love, because I've never failed you. I've tried always to show that you were the one thing I cared about in this world. I thought that I could bring you security and comfort and even luxury, and that you could give me the things I've been robbed of all my life."

Sanderson watched and listened, fascinated, held as by the skill of an actor performing in some monstrous rôle. He glanced at Frances Petterson, and saw her breast rise and fall as she stood there, her mouth open, her eyes drawn to the face of the man who looked down at her as he talked eloquently, tenderly, in a deep, vibrating barytone.

"I've never claimed any right to dictate to you," he went on. "You know that, Frances. I've asked you to marry me of your own free will or not at all. At first you were just a child whose life I had saved. It wasn't until I saw you growing up into a beautiful woman, and I found myself with money enough, and with no other interest in life than you, that I ever thought of marriage. I don't know what these men have told you about me. I'm defenseless before their slanders; but you have known me since you were a child. You know whether I've been a friend to you. You know whether you can trust me. You must decide now between these men and me."

He ceased and drew back, standing with his arms still folded in an attitude of humility, resignation, and virtue scorned.

"By George!" thought Sanderson, even in his brimming excitement. "He does it magnificently!"

Then the reporter looked at the girl. He was scarcely surprised when she took a step to Captain Tollefson's side.

"I am ready to marry you at any time," she said.

Sanderson saw that her lip was quivering, but she turned, her chin high, and met his gaze. He saw pain, pride, unswerving decision, before she turned her eyes away to confront Captain Nestlewood.

The old man did not wait for her. He strode over and shook his clenched fist in Tollefson's face.

"None of your damned heroics!" he shouted in a voice that shook with excitement. "You murdered this girl's father, and God knows what you did to her mother. You stole her fortune; but as there's a God in heaven, you sha'n't have her!"

Tollefson had drawn back a pace, and his face went white. Captain Nestlewood whirled on the little cockney and seized his shoulders in a mighty grip. He shook him like a terrier.

"Come clean!" he cried. "Come clean, or I'll kill you here and now with my bare hands! You saw him do it. You helped him. You're a murderer, and you'll swing for it!"

Sanderson saw Tom's pallor and heard the rattle of his breath. The little man stuttered and stammered.

"So 'elp me God, sir, I didn't!" came his hoarse voice. "I was aboard the schooner all the time. Tollefson shipped a crew of natives and went ashore with them before daylight. First I knew was seeing the 'ouse blaze up. Then I 'eard a woman screaming and some gunshots, and they came back on board with the woman and child and a strong box."

The little man was shaking violently, his teeth chattering. He dropped to his knees before Nestlewood.

"So 'elp me God, it's the truth!" he sobbed. "I ain't 'ad a minute's peace since. Look out!" His voice rose to a scream. "Don't let him 'urt me!"

Sanderson whirled, too late, to feel across his wrist the sting of powder and to see Tollefson with a smoking gun in his hand. The little cockney had sunk down in a heap on the floor, his mangled hand fumbling and tugging at his hip pocket.

It flashed out now, and both guns roared as Sanderson dropped to the floor with his own ready.

Masters fired twice more, and through the smoke Sanderson saw Tollefson's great body sway, totter, and lurch suddenly down, while the revolver dropped from his hand.

At a low, moaning cry of wonder and horror, Sanderson turned to see Frances Petterson pressing back against the table, her hands up to ward off the sight of the man whom a moment before she had been prepared to accept as her mate. Sanderson knelt at his side, then quickly pulled a quilt from the couch and hid the sprawling, lifeless figure from her sight.

He tried to lead her from the room. As they passed Captain Nestlewood, where he leaned over the prostrate Masters, he looked up at them with exultation in his face.

"Thank God," he murmured, and bent again near the wounded man's lips.

Sanderson and the girl knelt at his side. The little man, breathing hard, was whispering hoarsely in response to the captain's urging.

"Yes, sir," they heard him say. "She died on board without ever speaking. She wouldn't eat or speak. She died a few days before we got to his island—yes, his island. He was chief there, but she wouldn't give way to him. He was afraid of her. He thought her spirit walked the island, and after that he was afraid to stay there. He sold the natives off to a labor agent. I didn't dare talk. He kept threatening to kill me. I 'elped carry the money to the schooner, but I never got a dollar of it. It worried him, and he thought he could make it all right by marrying the girl. Her mother's curse—got him—all right!"

He went off into a fit of convulsive coughing.

Captain Nestlewood turned to the girl, who sat huddled on the floor by his side, her face buried in her hands, weeping. He stroked her golden hair with his large, clumsy hand.

"You must come and stay with me for a few days," he said.

Sanderson suddenly remembered his newspaper.

"I'm going now," he said to the captain. "I'll send a doctor down here to look after Masters. Then I'll go and write

my story. In the mean time don't talk to any one, and don't report to the police. It will be time enough when the paper's gone to press."

VIII

AN hour later, while Sanderson wrote furiously, and the city editor stood with his watch in his hand, eager to get the best sensational story of the year into the first edition, the reporter was called to the telephone, and found Captain Nestlewood, in Sausalito, at the other end.

"I've just heard from my friend on the revenue cutter," the old captain said. "They searched Tollefson's schooner. Guess what they found there!"

"Make it snappy, skipper!" cried Sanderson, his nerves on edge. "What?"

"Three cases of English sovereigns in some false work in the hull. I had them examined, and there's not one coined since 1902!"

Two hours later Sanderson left the office, with the city editor's congratulations ringing in his ears, and hurried to the Sausalito ferry. At Nestlewood's Cottage the old captain met him on the porch.

"Hush, my boy! She's asleep!" he whispered hoarsely.

A reaction stole over Sanderson as they sat on the porch, while inside the China boy hustled about decorating the house with flowers and colored papers, happy as only a Chinaman can be over an occasion for a party.

"I don't know about this," said Sanderson. "I'm not so sure. How do we know she didn't love him?"

Captain Nestlewood leaned forward and searched the young man's face incredulously. Then his body began to sway back and forth. He pounded his thigh and exploded in laughter. He poked Sanderson violently in the ribs.

"Guess who she talked about all the way over in the ferry!" he said. "I won't tell you; but if I ever saw a human being happy and relieved, it was Miss Frances Petterson. I didn't realize before how game she was standing up to what she thought was her duty. Do you know the first thing she said after I heard from the revenue cutter? Seems you'd been telling her some secrets. Anyhow, she looks up at me blushing and says:

"'Would that be enough to buy a newspaper in a town of about fifteen or twenty thousand people, somewhere near here, do you suppose?'"

THE END

THE DREAM AND THE STREAM

THERE among the hills we know
Our stream is running;
Scarcely melted is the snow,
Yet on its banks the violets blow,
Daintily sunning.

Green wands of the silent fern,
Blossom, bee, and starling—
Virgin gold the meadows burn;
All the happy things return—
All that rimes with darling.

Woodlands, with the thought of you
Are weaving bowers
Fairly upholstered new,
With hangings green and gold and blue
Of freshest flowers.

All is glad and all a gleam;
All is ready for our dream
To come back beside the stream!

Richard Leigh